

*The LOVELY LAND*  
*Itinerary of the author's journeys*  
*in Sweden by rail, steamer,*  
*car and coach, bicycle, bus,*  
*and afoot*



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## THE LOVELY LAND

By S. F. A. COLES:

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THE LOVELY LAND

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THE COMMONWEALTH AND EMPIRE REVIEW

# THE LOVELY LAND

*A LYRICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE REALM  
AND PEOPLE OF SWEDEN*

S. F. A. COLES



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## TO MY WIFE

sharer in two of my five journeys to Sweden—  
one by the cargo-boat *Vikingland* from Alexandria—  
in remembrance of other days in Oberbayern.

*There is a magic stillness like to sleep  
In these green uplands, garlanded with trees;  
Lone cattle graze on slopes of mountains steep,  
Tbreathing the dewy meads' felicities.*

*There is a silence to the soul more dear  
Than any conquest, or a sudden wealth—  
Here, where Delight is king with courtiers near,  
Where man returns to nature and to health!*

*Where eager Isar leaps beyond the pines,  
A flashing fillet for the earth's green hair,  
Where spires of chapels rise and forest shrines  
Breathing to blue immensities a prayer . . .*

*O friend who rests beside me in this place,  
Wordless with adoration as the air,  
Those who once meet her cohorts face to face  
Must follow Beauty's blazon—everywhere!*

Waldhernalm,  
bei Wackersberg



'The artist who has the sentiment of reality must never fear to be lyrical. The objective world retains its power in his work, no matter to what metamorphoses lyricism may have subjected it.'

JEAN COCTEAU, *Le Rappel à l'Ordre*

'A longing pure and not to be described  
Drove me to wander over woods and fields,  
And in the midst of hot abundant tears  
I felt a world arise and live in me.'

GOETHE

'It is a lovely land . . .'

*Handbook*

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S. F. A. C.

IVER,

*Easter Day, 1949*

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## BOOK I

*The barques sail upstream and downstream alike.  
Every highway is open because thou dawnest.  
The fish in the river leap up before thee.  
Thy rays are in the midst of the great green sea.*

*Creator of the germ in woman,  
Maker of seed in man,  
Giving life to the son in the body of his mother,  
Soothing him that he may not weep,  
Nurse (even) in the womb,  
Giver of breath to animate every one that he maketh! . . .  
Thou openest his mouth in speech,  
Thou suppliest his necessities.*

HYMN TO THE SUN,<sup>1</sup> Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV),  
d. 1358 B.C.

<sup>1</sup> "Man's earliest known attainment of the idea of an all-loving spirit of goodness, unrestricted by racial considerations."



## IN VÄSTERGÖTLAND

### CHAPTER I

#### EASTWARD FROM GOTHENBURG

. . . he (*Verner von Heidenstam*) recognised that Sweden—more than Norway, and a great deal more than Denmark—was a poetic country.

W. GORE ALLEN, *Renaissance in the North*, p. 106

IT SO HAPPENED that in 1946 I occupied some portion of an otherwise trying summer revisiting Sweden, that most ancient and lyrically satisfying land of the Suiones (whom, as students of history know, Tacitus first mentions in his *Germania*, cap. 44, as possessing a king whose power was absolute, and “a strong fleet which protects them from the incursions of hostile neighbours”), of the Svear, from whom the Swedish Vikings descended, and the Götar of southern Sweden, about whose sturdy characteristics Pliny, as usual, has something perspicacious to say, but whether the Elder or the Younger I cannot make out, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* maintaining silence on this point.

Gothenburg, that pleasant and friendly haven which (says local legend) “hangs out its washing when the sun shines in England”, the second city and the first harbour of Sweden, was experiencing a heat wave which had arrived by way of Russia, of all places; so I passed the major part of three days in and around the enticing open-air swimming baths at Liseberg, where, apart from the gaiety and coolness, one could admire the physique of the typical young male, and the fresh and sane beauty of the typical young female denizens of this corner of Västergötland.

Early in the morning of the fourth day I left Gothenburg by train for the extreme western province of Dalsland, which is not even mentioned in one foreign guide book, and admittedly well off the beaten track, and left my cabin trunk to go on to Stockholm in the M/S *Saga* by the sea route round the

coast of Skåne, whose inhabitants the Romans<sup>1</sup>—who never reached Sweden—dubbed Scandinavians: hence the nomenclature Scandinavia.

The train stood at the first platform in the clean, bright and attractive Drottningtorget ("Queen's Square") railway station, awaiting the last of the morning's passengers by the *Persontåg*. Presently, at the lifting of the guard's "orb and sceptre" which replaces the green flag on Sweden's eleven thousand miles of electrified railway system, the coaches rolled smoothly out into strong sunlight along that narrow strip of land which, before 1658, formed the only outlet to the sea on her western borders, all Bohuslän having been collared by Norway, and all Halland and Skåne by predatory Denmark.

For some miles the railway line follows the flow of the Göta-älv river, scene of much of the action in that gory Anglo-Saxon classic, *Beowulf*, whose mouldy and dog-eared parchment manuscript I used to pore over in the Manuscript Department of the British Museum in my youth, completely ignorant as I was at that time that the great mounds, the pagan "pyramids", at Old Uppsala, near Stockholm, contained the calcined bones of the four sixth-century pagan kings mentioned in the chronicle, which was newly translated some years ago by my former friend and mentor, the late Sir Archibald Strong, one-time Jury Professor of English Language and Literature at Adelaide. Presently the massive ruins loomed into sight, above the historic village of Kungälv, the ancient Kongahälla, where in the Middle Ages the Scandinavian kings used to meet, of what was once the strongest castle in the North, the Bohus fortress built in 1310, which has never known in all the centuries occupation by an enemy, even Norwegian or Dane; and which gives its name to the province of Bohuslän.

Slender birch trees and flat green landscapes now hove into view of this most ancient province of Västergötland, inhabited uninterruptedly for over five thousand years, which is not so much when one realises that archæological investigations in

<sup>1</sup> In a Stockholm exhibition in 1947 there was a Roman soldier's shield bearing a roughly incised map of the Baltic, the earliest known.

Östergötland alone prove that man has lived continuously in Sweden for anything from 10,000 to 15,000 years. . . .

I now strode with eager steps down a train corridor where hats and coats were hanging cosily from hooks, as at home, and where glittering mirrors and carafes of drinking water enticed the ego or proffered the quenching of a problematical thirst ("I invariably get an extra ten per cent of travel joy in Swedish trains," writes a traveller, "merely by the act of hanging up my coat and hat before I take my seat"). I was conscious of an inward buoyancy with which the suffering and travail of a second World War in a single generation had left me too little familiar. It was like a sudden access of youth and renewed energy, to set foot once again on the hospitable soil of this fair Northern realm where the tumult and madness of war had been unknown for well over a century, since, in fact, 1814 when Sweden was allied with England against Napoleon, one of whose tallest marshals was destined by one of the extraordinary accidents of history, to become by invitation of the Swedish *Riksdag* Crown Prince, and to found the present dynasty.

Pondering upon this and that and all that I have just written, and leaving such rich mental fare to ferment and ripen in the subconscious, I entered what at that moment seemed to be an empty compartment. It was only when I sat down on a hard and well-varnished wooden seat that I realised that I was in a third-class compartment, whereas the Swedish Tourist Traffic Association in Stockholm had sent a first-class pass for the journey, not only to Dalsland, but right across Sweden. But I did not dream of transferring myself to the rolling stock of the rich; for it has been my experience during journeyings in many countries that third-class train travel brings you closer to the heart and mind, aye and the soul too, of a particular people; but in case any reader may commend this discovery I must record that Havelock Ellis first remarked upon it in that fine travel book, *The Soul of Spain*.

I was wearing a carnation in my buttonhole presented, with a tab, "Welcome—Swedish P.E.N.", by a charming lady from

Stockholm as I stepped ashore at the Masthuggskajen, the first passenger off the *Saga* after the departure of the Swedish Crown Prince and the Crown Princess Louise (whom Swedish people sometimes charmingly call "the Queen"), who had joined it at Tilbury at the conclusion of their first visit to England since the war; and I revelled in its rich and heady scent as we left behind Nödinge, with its ancient church, and Nol, and presently lost sight of the river at Älvängen.

Turning to gaze out of the opposite window at serried woodlands and satiny lakes all asheen in the sunlight, I suddenly became aware of a single fellow-traveller who was sitting immobile in the far corner seat drinking in the beauty of the day and the morning. One direct glance at the erect figure, whose back seemed resolutely turned, revealed that it was of the feminine gender—a Swedish girl I made no doubt. That she was young was at once evident in the grace and slenderness of her figure, clad in a flowing summer frock of the same hue as my beautiful carnation. The frock, I observed, had embroidery of some kind of Viking design, like runes, at the neck and hems; perhaps, indeed, one of those actual oriental motifs brought back by the Vikings—who always sallied forth in the spring-time—from Novgorod, Constantinople, Venice or Athens, for even to-day such traces are to be found in the ornamentation and colour schemes of Swedish peasant woven fabrics. That she was prepossessing I also sensed, with the shock of happy aesthetic pain that Beauty always brings to her seekers and servants, for the maid now turned round and, looking fearlessly and candidly at me for a moment with wide and luminous grey eyes, suddenly dissolved into a frank and gentle smile.

In a moment I was beside her. . . .

She said that she was seventeen, that she had grown up a little too fast and accordingly her heart had become slightly affected; that she was on her way for a restful holiday with relatives on a farm outside Åmål ("O-Mol"—what a euphonious, what a poetic name for a town, I thought, and loved her there and then). The delicate threadlike texture of her light golden hair, her rose complexion and childlike innocence of expression,

and the Grecian lines of her young and supple body, recalled at once the exquisite medieval tale of Aucassin and Nicolette, which I had first read in a Hampstead home when frequenting the weekly literary evenings in the home of the late Sturge Moore.

The girl readily wrote down her name when I offered for the purpose the cover of a shipping journal collected that morning at the offices of the Swedish Orient Line, for whom I had written pamphlets before the war in return for passages on their fine cargo ships between Egypt, Holland and Scandinavia—"Barbro L——", with an address in Karlagatan, Gothenburg. A charming Christian name, suggestive of this lyrical crepuscular North-land, with its primeval freshness, and of those "ancestral voices" from pre-conscious times which speak so reprovingly to our disillusioned and over-sophisticated age in the haunting symphonies of Sibelius, whose proud boast it is that "men have mixed you cocktails of one colour and another, but I give you nothing but cold water."<sup>1</sup>

"Barbro"—yes, a fair name, famed in Swedish history as is Flora Macdonald's in Scottish story. For it was the young Swedish nobleman Gustavus Vasa himself, liberator of his country from the Danish yoke and founder of the great Vasa dynasty, who, after hiding as a peasant in the barn—still standing—at Rankhyttan, in Dalecarlia, on the right bank of the little lake Runn (where he was obliged to thresh corn), escaped capture from his Danish pursuers when Barbro Stigsdotter let him down to the ground at dusk by a sheet, as her husband, Arend Persson, was contemplating the betrayal of his future king.

The fresh and friendly creature beside me became that morning a human symbol, a prototype, for I seemed to see in her the beauty and heroism of Swedish women through the ages, who, with their spiritual balance, moral force, and superlative health and wholesomeness, have gained a status with their menfolk and contributed magnificently to the political, social and humanitarian life of the country.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Beethoven's claim: "*Moi, je suis Bacchus, qui presse le nectar délicieux pour tous les hommes,*" which I first read on his bust in the Luxembourg galleries in Paris when I was young, and found later in his letters.



Acting as any impressionable foreigner would have done to such a fellow-passenger on the threshold of life, I snatched the carnation from my buttonhole and held it against her cheek—flower to flower, blossom to blossom, two of Nature's fondest creations vying with each other in silent and loving rivalry!

"Oh, thank you!" said the girl, turning full round with a beaming smile to shake my hand. To judge by her expression the insignificant offering might have been a pearl necklace or gold bangle.

At that moment a third traveller entered the compartment, a middle-aged, dark-haired woman who sat down opposite us. With the ready response which both Latins and Scandinavians possess but which is not so common in England, she smiled radiantly when she saw the picture, and marked with swift feminine understanding the lyrical impulse that had prompted me to hold my flower against that flower-like cheek, to present my carnation to a Northern Nicolette clad in a carnation-coloured summer frock with Viking ornamentations. . . . The ticket-collector also smiled broadly at the tableau when he entered to punch our tickets.

"Oh, look!" Barbro suddenly exclaimed as we left Öxnered after obtaining a glimpse of the north shores of Lake Vänern, clutching my arm in sisterly comradeship—"chickens!" And she indicated with her child-like smile a flock of snowy Wyandottes which were fluttering around a fowl run while a woman in a blue smock threw handfuls of chicken feed at them. Indeed it was worth looking at, a Seurat, a Pissaro, with the fine summer pointillist sunlight outlining everything in gold.

"Do you like Sweden?" the dark-haired woman presently asked.

"No," I said, "I don't"—and then, as her eyes and those of Barbro widened in dismay and the smiles left their lips, I added enthusiastically: "I love Sweden!" . . .

As the train sped smokelessly along and with perfect equipoise—although the landscapes were now less interesting—I took from my pocket a letter which had been awaiting collection at the Turistbyrå at Gothenburg, and read it through again :

## EASTWARD FROM GOTHENBURG

Dear Mr. Coles,

*We have received your letter of May 21st and have done our best in order to arrange things according to your wishes. Enclosed you will find a railway-ticket which will take you via Värmland and Dalecarlia to Stockholm with departure from Gothenburg on the 29th of May.*

*You mention in your letter that you should like to visit Värmland. This, of course, is an excellent idea but we feel that the time is too short for this visit to Selma Lagerlöf's province.*

*We suggest, that instead of staying over night in Värmland, you go to Dalsland, which is on your way, and stay there. Dalsland is without a doubt one of our loveliest provinces and, strange though it may seem, it is very little known by the tourist in general. We really feel that you would enjoy it. We have, furthermore, been lucky enough to contact Miss Brita Rådström, secretary of the Dalsland Tourist Traffic Ass. in Bengtsfors and she suggests as follows:*

*You leave Gothenburg at 9.15 on May 29th and get off the train at Köpmannebro. They may tell you that the train does not stop there but it will do so on May 29th according to Miss Rådström as it is bringing a lot of schoolchildren for whom special arrangements have been made. Miss Rådström will meet you either at Köpmannebro or she will board the train at Mellerud and go in search for you. She will then take you for a trip on the Dalsland Canal—this trip is well worth doing, we assure you—she has also promised to order a room for you at one of the hotels, she will, in fact, arrange everything for you and we think you will be satisfied.*

*Wishing you welcome to Sweden and hoping that you will have a pleasant trip we are*

*sincerely yours,*

SWEDISH TOURIST TRAFFIC ASSOCIATION

A pleasant prospect, in truth! A day's cruise on the Dalsland Canal, a chain of lakes stretching from Vänern to the Norwegian frontier, through a province so far totally unfamiliar to me and in company with a party of Swedish schoolboys and a cicerone with a name like the sound of that waterfall in the Bavarian Alps, above Lenggries, where I had revelled a decade before in the glittering megarithm and declared afterwards to a dear companion that I felt immortal! Yes, a delightful prospect indeed, beneath this blue, cloud-flecked sky, with the "unnumbered smile" of the summer sun coruscating on the waters.

Awake to the luxury of living I turned towards Barbro's corner again, but it was unoccupied; only her handbag and the carnation reposed on the arm-rest. The third traveller had also gone, in readiness doubtless for the climb out at Mellerud on to the track, whence a branch line leads north-west to the Norwegian frontier station.

Between Mellerud and Köpmannebro smiling Miss Rådström suddenly appeared in the compartment, clad in serviceable white serge and white walking shoes. As we exchanged greetings I took note of those open and noble Dalsland features which one comes to look out for as typical when moving about in the province. It seemed that our conversation had only just begun when she suddenly sprang up from her seat and exclaimed: "Here we are! There is the steamer, waiting at the jetty. She looks very small, but she is big enough, I promise, to take us all."

Flinging the carnation in Barbro's corner I hurried out, and, clambering down to the track, crossed over to the lake-shore in company with Miss Rådström and the thirty schoolboys, all wearing brightly coloured tasselled skull caps and plus-fours, which even the most diminutive boys seem to sport in Sweden, and soon we were aboard the little steamer and pushing out into the first stretch of the Dalsland Canal built by Colonel Nils Eriksson, one of the two famous engineer brothers, which forms the idyllic link between Dalsland and south-west Värmland and the Norwegian frontier. . . .

In Stockholm one day there arrived a card with the Gothenburg postmark, and, in a well-formed, unknown but feminine handwriting the message:

*I am going into Småland for the summer, with my father. I am sorry I shall not be able to see you when you return to Gothenburg. Your Swedish friend—Barbro.*

On the reverse was a coloured reproduction of a blaze of flowers at the foot of a rugged oak. . . .

To Småland she had gone, then, that mighty province reaching Vättern in the north and the Baltic in the east; that region of

## EASTWARD FROM GOTHENBURG

vast forests, innumerable lakes, and an archipelago "of great beauty"; that southern province of "Goth-land" where, says the legend, when Sweden was in the making Our Lord gave Saint Peter "a free hand". . . .

Maiden of longed-for loveliness,  
Spirit attired in the silvery sheen of life's most  
ethereal dress,  
Whose happy cheek is aglow with love's pinkest  
wild-rose caress! . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Gustaf Fröding's poem "Fylgia", translated by Charles Wharton Stork.

## DALSLAND

### CHAPTER II

## LAKES AND FORESTS

*The lyrical and poetical elements in all Swedish scenery make a strong and unforgettable impression on the mind of the traveller.*

SWEDEN, a Government pamphlet

PUNCTUALLY AT NOON the little steamer cast off from the miniature landing stage below Köpmannebro station and edged boldly out into the open waters of Långviken, the first in the series of lakes, canals and locks which make up this 160-miles-long Dalsland trans-regional waterway. On previous visits I had occasionally travelled across Sweden by the peaceful and enchanting Göta Canal route. The Dalsland Canal is a quarter of the length, but even more wildly beautiful in parts, although still *aqua incognita* to the large majority of visitors. Its waterways are, however, much frequented in summer by local canoeists and inland yachtsmen, who make it a kind of Swedish Norfolk Broads.<sup>1</sup>

Fröken Rådström, who sat in the bows of the steamer indicating landmarks and places of interest, spoke of a canoeing Australian and his wife who had paddled that way before the war, becoming so enamoured of the sylvan peacefulness of the route that, during a year's journey through the whole European canal system, they had spent two months at Bengtsfors, the canal-side township of two thousand six hundred souls to which we were destined. "When they finally dragged themselves away," she said, "I watched them from the coffee-room at the Gammalgård ('old house') as their tiny canoe threaded its way across Lelången and its twenty-six miles of open water. All the time, until they

<sup>1</sup> Canoeing was first introduced into Sweden last century by a Scotsman, name unrecorded, who dinned into not unwilling ears that a land possessing 96,000 lakes, 115 river systems, and a coastline measuring some 4,800 miles was an ideal one for both home and visiting canoeists.

disappeared beyond the farthest islets, they kept turning round and waving. They were sorry to leave all right—and I sometimes wonder where they are now.”

We followed a northerly course across Långviken, and presently passed through a lock into Svanfjorden, and then veered westwards into Hjarterudssundet, and north-westwards across Lake Spången, and so to Upperud, where there is a wood-pulp factory, a grain roller and paper mills, which we passed about one o'clock. The lake water, “lapping low” as at Innisfree, glistened and shone in the wonderful morning sunlight like sheeted steel, and along the shores, the massed and serried trees—the friendly poplars (*choppas* in Spain), the spruce and those poetical silver birches which the late Prince Eugen loved to paint—came down to the very water’s edge, eloquent of that profound French adage, the name and titles of whose author I, alas, know not—although it may very well be Montaigne: “If you drive Nature away she will come back at the gallop.”

“I suppose the trolls live in deep forests like these?” I said to Miss Rådström, as the boys came tumbling over each other to the bows while we negotiated two more locks, and entered the Höljensjöarna lake. She laughed heartily, and replied mockingly: “Oh, yes, we Dalsland folk are dreadfully scared of them. A single tap on the door at night and we know they have arrived! But they keep away in summer, thank goodness, when it is light for twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four.” She spoke English very well, having stayed for a year in Surrey, and she had lived in Paris, too.

Confirmation of the persistence of the troll legend in the interior of Sweden—persistent and co-existent with the legend of the leprechauns in Eire (for whoever heard of leprechauns in Ulster, which is peopled almost exclusively by descendants of Scotch mercenaries who have scarcely a noggin of Irish blood among the lot of them, hence the intransigence of the South?)—is echoed in Swedish painting by those quaint water-colours in the National Museum at Stockholm by John Bauer, who obviously, either in dreams or reality, had seen some, and was now provided at first hand by a number of diminutive wooden figures, roughly

modelled with a knife, which the lock-keeper, an old man soon to retire, brought down to the lock-side to sell. His charges, however, were too high; and when he quoted a hundred kröner as his figure for an indifferent pastel of the Höljensjöarna lake, we bade him *Farväl* and turned our attention to Håverud, our next halt and one of the most fantastic sights of western Sweden. (One did not take the old lock-keeper seriously as an artist, howsoever he took himself; but his efforts occasioned the reflection that, whereas Sweden excelled in great painters in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, such as Zorn, Larsson, Liljefors, Prince Eugen and others, her examples of "modern art" lack completely, in my opinion, all inspiration and "know-how". Abundant colour is manipulated with evident relish, but excellence of draughtsmanship has declined, and all spiritual and inner propulsion seems totally lacking. Why this should be so I cannot say, as in almost every other sphere of human activity the Swedes touch nothing but what they adorn and ultimately excel in.)<sup>1</sup>

Håverud, set in most majestic scenery, boasts a paper-mill, a wood-pulp factory, a power-station, and an aqueduct constructed over rapids. Here we all scrambled out on to the bank while the steamer, and indeed the canal itself, were carried over a waterfall in a "trench" of sheet metal built in 1868. High above this aqueduct was a railway bridge for the Gothenburg-Dalecarlia line (the famed Bergslagens line to Dalecarlia and Stockholm), and directly above that again towered a magnificent suspension bridge only recently opened for motor and pedestrian traffic.

As we stood on this highest bridge admiring glorious views over forests and lakes as far as Buterud lock (but I stepped back

<sup>1</sup> "None of the important Swedish artists of the past has had any influence on modern art; neither Alexander Roslin (1718-93), the most famous of the old Swedish painters, who at the time of the Swedish king, Gustaf III, lived in Paris as a portrait painter, nor his contemporary Carl Gustav Pilo (1730-93), the greatest painter Sweden has hitherto produced." J. P. Hodin on "Contemporary Swedish Painting", in *The Anglo-Swedish Review*.

"It's a funny thing the way the Swedes with an applied art better than anywhere else in the world can't manage oil-painting. It's an extraordinary thing the way they seem to lose all their normal taste and discernment when confronted with it." Margharita Laski in *Vogue* ("Sweden To-day"), May, 1947.

from the handrail like one appalled upon observing our tiny steamer negotiating the aqueduct "what worlds away")—as we stood on this extreme height, I say, in the heart of Dalsland, Fröken Rådström told me about a local postman whose weekly round took him to some of the remotest farms and villages in the region, and whose cottage, she said, contained a library of thousands of volumes, including many tomes on Shakespeare in many languages. "He is a reader, a scholar," she went on, "and can describe the life of ancient Greece and Egypt, which would interest you as you have lived in those countries, and in addition he knows the history of Sweden backwards, to the Stone Age and beyond. Yet he was never at Gothenburg even, and is quite content living alone with his volumes in solitude."

Thoreau would surely have found in that Dalsland postman a proper man, a man to praise and uphold, a wise inhabitant of this war- and hate-racked planet:

I see young men whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labour in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have not to live a man's life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and wood-lot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labour enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.<sup>1</sup>

"Subdue and cultivate" is good.

And that other magnificent New England walnut, Emerson, also has something pertinent to say on the point:

<sup>1</sup> *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau (Penguin Illustrated Classics, pp. 10-11).



For now (he roundly declares in the famous essay on "Friendship"), after so many ages of experience, what do we know of nature, or of ourselves? Not one step has man taken toward the solution of the problem of his destiny. In one condemnation of folly stand the whole universe of men. . . . He (*viz.*, the man who seeks a friend) proposes himself for contests where Time, Want, Danger, are in the lists, and he alone is victor who has truth enough in his constitution to preserve the delicacy of his beauty from the wear and tear of all these.<sup>1</sup>

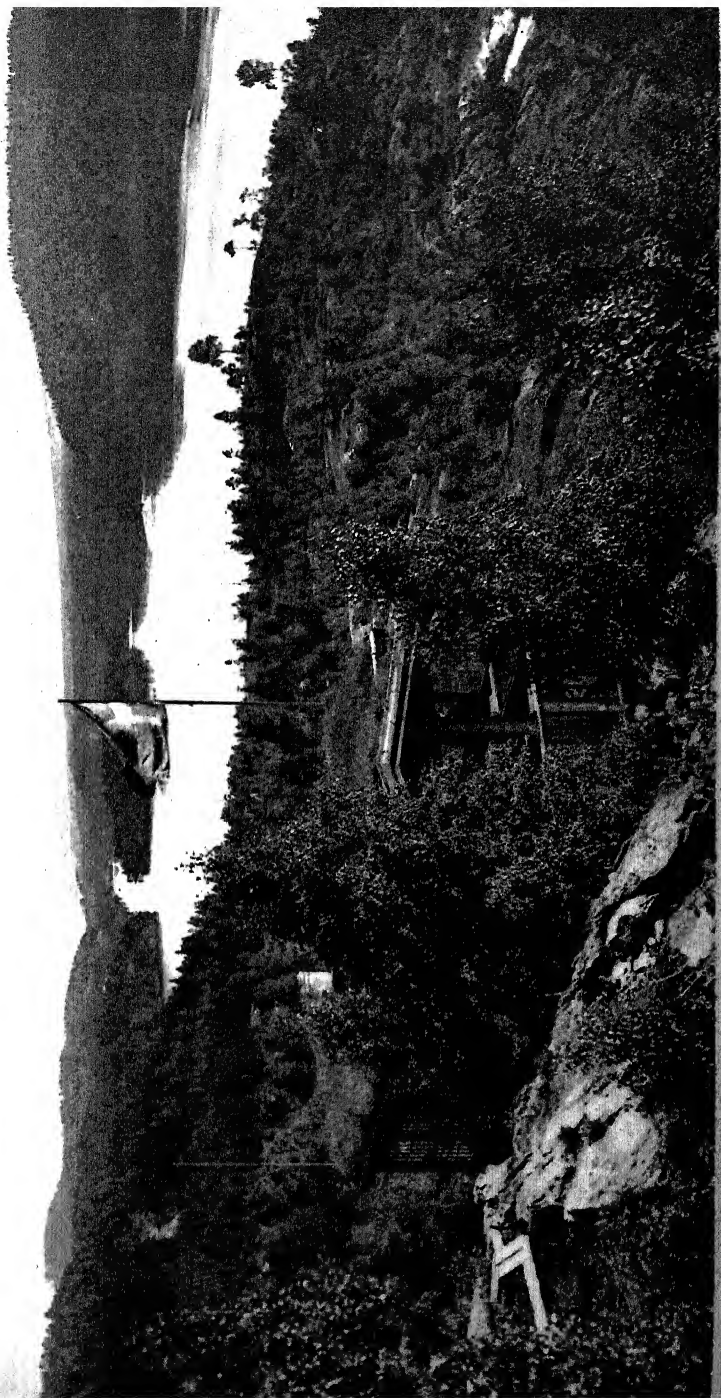
But enough of the New England puritan philosophers, in whom, however, Swedes must have some interest as a Colony sailed away, soon after the *Mayflower* left Plymouth, to Delaware, from a quayside building in Gothenburg still to be seen.

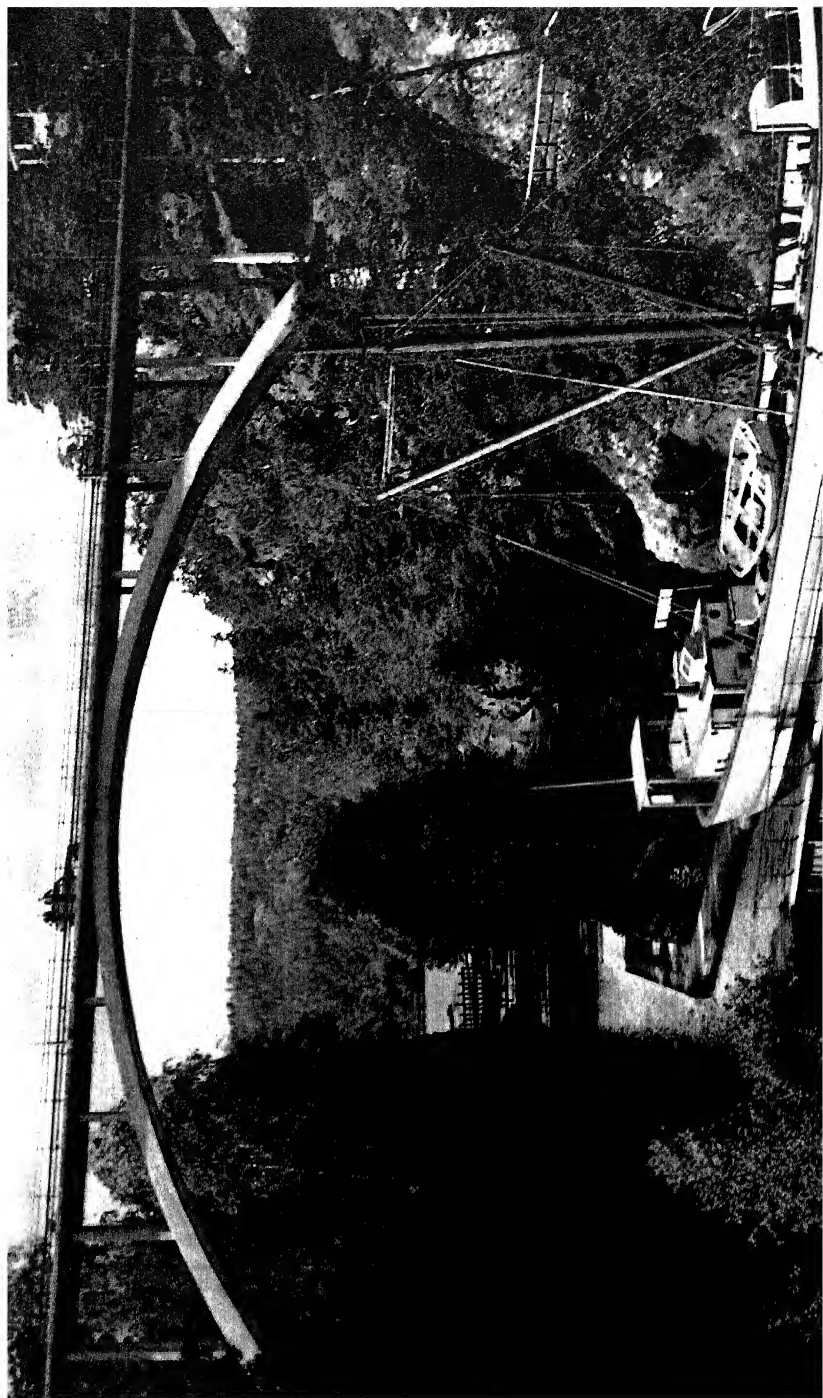
From Håverud, then, where the signature is carved in the cliff face of the first royal tourist to pass this way, to wit King Charles XV who died in 1872, but not before helping to set Sweden upon the path which has led to her present prosperity, we glided on past Åklången and through Buterud lock into Lake Råvarpen, where, near the village of Högsbyn, there are Bronze Age inscriptions and drawings clear as when first incised with a blunt instrument on the smooth, glacier-polished surfaces of immense flat rocks on the eastern shore. At Mustadfors, while the steamer was negotiating more locks, we trooped over to visit a noted School of Handicraft (*Hemslöjd*), which has its counterpart in every province, for pride in handiwork is kept very much alive in this unspoiled land—would it had been in over-industrialised Britain.

But the name of this place where the school stood, first claimed my interest—Steneby; for this showed that it had been a Viking settlement originally, like Grimsby and Whitby and Tenby, and Visby in the isle of Gotland.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, by Ralph Waldo Emerson (World's Classics: O.U.P.)

<sup>2</sup> Scandinavian settlers have left some thousand place-names on the map of England, more thickly distributed, naturally, in the North and East. If the name of a place ends in -bury, -borough, -ford, -forth, -ham, -ton, -worth, we are to suppose that it was christened by the Anglo-Saxons. If it ends in -beck, -by, -dale, -ey, -fell, -force, -haugh, -ness, -tarn, -toft, -thwaite, -with, the place was named by Northern colonists of the ninth, tenth or eleventh centuries. *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, by Henry Goddard Leach (p. 20). Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature.





The steamer now bore us onwards, in the lovely golden sunlight of the Swedish summer afternoon, to Långton and Billingsfors, a pleasant-looking industrial township where some of the young workers in the local paper-mill were resting on the canal bank, or contentedly fishing from it. An hour earlier the plump and jolly wife of the captain of the steamer (neither "had the English" and were, therefore, by Swedish standards, illiterate) had served up in the tiny dining saloon an appetising lunch of meat and potatoes followed by cheese with celery, washed down by the light lager beer, *öl* (our "ale") which is brewed and bottled in three grades with small but increasing percentages of alcohol, in each of the provinces. Now the good woman regaled us with real coffee as we sat in the bows approaching Bengtsfors, a junction point for railway and steamer traffic, and watched its scattered houses overtopped by the tree-studded slopes of a gentle hill, looming gradually nearer and nearer.

At six o'clock we arrived, having taken just six and a half hours to make this delightful and memorable steamer trip from Köpmannebro, and soon we were all laboriously ascending the winding road from the bridge to the *Gammalgård*, where the Folk Museum is situated and where my schoolboy mates were to stay for three days accompanied by their master, a fine young man from Ludvika.

The view at sunset from the high terrace over Lake Lelången is one I shall not easily forget, though I have seen many of the finest views in the world; it induced the right mood to enjoy a long twilight discussion in the roomy upstairs floor of the museum with my hostess—whose father arranged it and collected the exhibits—the schoolmaster, and another visitor: except when they relapsed into their native tongue, which nevertheless I always find as musical and pleasing a language to listen to as Spanish, even when I do not understand a word!

As we descended the homely wooden stairs to inspect the ground-floor exhibits, which include ancient peasant spoons fretted with a cross through which trolls were despatched to the nether regions at sight, there was a tap at the front door. "Trolls!"

I said instinctively, and Miss Rådström burst out laughing again. But the caller was only her noble-featured, white-haired mama, youthfully smiling, and I certainly could not have recited to *her* the lines from Fröding's "Mountain Troll" poem:

And into a sack I'll get her,  
And take her home with me straight,  
And then at Yule I will eat her  
Served up on a fine golden plate. . . .

At nightfall a lodging was obtained for me down in the town, at the new Hotel Ellers, a comfortable wooden structure managed by a young Swede who told me in slow, laboured Americanese that he had been born in Chicago.

For those of my readers who like struggling with new and unfamiliar tongues I give the description of the hotel from the *Bengtsfors Chronicle*:

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"Nytt, trivsamt, fullt modernt. Varmt och kallt vatten samt telefon på rummen. Badrum. Klubberum. God mat. Härliga bäddar. Soligt och lugnt läge. Vaktmästare möter vid tåg och båtar. Samma regi: Baren and Nya Pensionatet, tel. 200 vid Storgatan."

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Not so difficult. And one can note how many words in the English rendering would be attributable to Viking incursions—and yet we are told by most authorities that the English language is almost exclusively a French and Anglo-Saxon *mélange*. Rubbish! . . .

In the early and luminous summer dawn, which comes up with heavenly softness in this land of bright summer-nights, birds sang in the blossom-laden branches of fruit trees which stood beneath and for some distance beyond my open bedroom window—those "little sisters" of the Saint of Assisi which had fallen upon him at Monte Alverno "with every demonstration of welcome, upon his head and shoulders and arms, in his cowl, and everywhere about him, while his companions and the amazed peasant who led his ass stood by wondering".

## LAKES AND FORESTS

Laudate sia mio Signore per suor nostra morte corporale:  
Da la quale nullo homo vivente puo scampare.  
Guai a quelli che more in peccato mortale!  
Beati quelli che se trovano nelé tue sanctissime voluntate  
Che la morte secunda non li porá far male.

Laudate et benedicite mio Signore et regratiate  
Et servite a lui cum grande humilitate.<sup>1</sup>

(Praised by our Sister Death, my Lord, art Thou,  
From whom no living man escapes.  
Who die in mortal sin have mortal woe;  
But blessed they who die doing Thy will,—  
The second death can strike at them no blow.

Praises, and thanks, and blessing to my Master be:  
Serve ye Him all, with great humility.)

“Little sisters,” I ought to have said, in the Franciscan manner standing at the window in pyjamas and addressing the exultant multitude of bird-life in the blossom-laden branches—“somewhat less noise, and it please you, until *frukost*.”

<sup>1</sup> *Cantico del Sole*, St. Francis of Assisi.

### CHAPTER III

#### GYMNASTIKFESTEN AT BILLINGSFORS

*O thou, our native land, our larger home,  
Weave of our lives thy glory and thy blessing.*

VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM, *Homeland*

TWO DAYS I spent at Bengtsfors, and left early in the morning of the third day by local bus for Åmål, where I thought I might catch a glimpse of Barbro but was disappointed.

On the second morning I went by car with the cheery school-boys to a place called Linheden, a high promontory in the neighbouring mountains from where a truly superb view was obtainable over the lakes and forests of half Dalsland. It reminded me of the climb to the peak of Navacerrada, high in the Guadarramas above Madrid, and the marvellous view from there over both Old and New Castile which I have described in my book *Spain Everlasting*, except that on that memorable walk I was alone.

In Dalsland, which few travellers, it seems, know much about, there are no ancestral manors and no castles at all because of the terrible and protracted wars waged in former centuries between Norway and Sweden. That very extraordinary man, the warrior-king Charles XII, who, after his succession in 1697, passed most of his short life leading his armies against Sweden's enemies, Russia, Poland, Austria, Norway and Denmark, was towards the end very active with his tired but devoted soldiers in this austere corner of his kingdom, and he fell at Frederikshald, the ancient Norwegian frontier town now called Halden, on December 11, 1718, shot through the back of the head, in a trench still existing, by an unknown hand, rumour said by a dissident among his own troops who had resolved thus to bring to an abrupt end the twenty-year royal odyssey which had completely exhausted and impoverished the nation.

The next day the boys were to visit Halden, and Miss Rådström invited me to go with them in the same car, but I

had no Norwegian visa, and such was the frontier formality at that time that no one could get across, even for an hour, without it. . . . Students of history should be liberated from all "visas".

Unquestionably, the destruction of the "big houses" of Dalsland had been total, all being burned to the ground or otherwise destroyed by one or other of the belligerents in what was in effect, even then, "total war", and I could discover with the naked eye not a roof, not a chimney to relieve the glorious monotony of the magnificent forests below us. But on our way up the mountain-side we did pass one or two lonely farmsteads and agricultural holdings which looked—as everything Swedish looks—clean, tidy, self-respecting and independent—proof of the proud sense of democracy of the Swede, to whom his home is his castle just as much, if not more so, than his home is to every Englishman. For serfdom, be it noted, was abolished in this country *a thousand years ago*, and the very air you breathe is liberal and liberating.

We took our ease by immense rocks scarred by the passage of the great glaciers which moved over the face of the North through the long, long Ice Epoch, and as the aromatic scents of sun-warmed timber and summer wildflowers smote the nostrils I asked the schoolmaster from Ludvika if his lads would sing some of their school songs. They were shy enough at first (for paradoxically the Swedish race, which must be one of the most hospitable to strangers on the face of the earth, is much more fundamentally shy than the English, who are prone to explain reserve as shyness) but started off with great willingness when the master repeated his request to "sing some Swedish songs for Mr. Coles". By way, as they thought, of a compliment and a fitting end to their recital they piped up with *Tipperary*, which I had last heard troops of the French garrison singing—a little uncertainly—as they returned to barracks after an evening out in the Tunisian oasis of Gabés, the Roman *Tacape*, lying between the great *Erg Sahara*, and the turquoise Mediterranean Sea. . . .

One day I went over to Billingsfors, the small but pretty



canal-side industrial township where the steamer had called at the end of the voyage from Köpmannebro. What a different scene met my enchanted gaze on that radiant morning! Teams of athletes, young men and maidens, reclined at ease on the canal bank, or were to be seen sauntering leisurely towards the *Idrottsplatsen* where the biennial "Gymnastikfesten" between the provinces of Dalsland and Bohuslän was due to start at a half past noon. The Dalsland girls, bare-headed and bare-legged, and attired in Greek *chitons* of sky-blue taffeta material, were figures come to life from a Greek frieze, bacchantes and mænads, and as most of them were good-looking and well formed, in fact "easy on the eye" as the music-hall artistes say, they rejoiced the sight. Those from Bohuslän were similarly attired, except that their tunics were white. And all the male athletes were dressed in the sweater, open-necked shirt and white trousers with white shoes which is the sign-manual of Swedish athletic prowess all over the Seven Seas.

The stadium, which is situated on an eminence above the town, has for back-cloth, so to speak, a wonderful natural amphitheatre of forest-covered mountains, overtopped on that day by an immense vault of blue sky. It was, in truth, the ideal setting for such a spectacle. Aspect and atmosphere were a palimpsest from classical Greece, and I found myself frequently comparing the site with the stadiums at Delphi, and Olympia, and lovely Epidauros, as the band struck up festive Swedish airs, and the heart-warming Swedish flag with its wide yellow cross on a sky-blue ground fluttered from high flagstaffs. When four hundred superbly fit gymnasts filed in and marched round in teams across the green grass my heart gave a leap and I could have cried to the sky-vault: Beauty of nature and beauty of man, here I find you together at last!

The massed groups came to a standstill in front of the grandstand, a girl leader from each advancing to the edge of the grass holding a national flag whose staff she rested on the ground as she stood gracefully at ease while everyone sang Luther's hymn, almost a second National Anthem, *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*—

## Gymnastikfesten AT BILLINGSFORS

“Vår Gud är oss en valdig Borg.  
Han är vårt vapen trygga;  
På honon i all och nöd sorg  
Vart boff vi vilja bygga;  
Mörkrete förste stiger ned,  
Hotande och vred.  
Han rustar sig förvisst  
Med våld argan och list.  
Likväl vi oss ej frukte.”

(A mighty Fortress is our God,  
A trusty Shield and Weapon;  
He helps us free from every need  
That hath us now o'ertaken.  
The old evil Foe  
Now means deadly woe;  
Deep guile and great might  
Are his dread arms in fight;  
On earth is not his equal.)<sup>1</sup>

As I watched the majestic and moving scene tears sprang to my eyes, and Keats' line to my lips—“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever . . .”

“Pretty girls, nice dresses.” A neighbour was exercising a limited knowledge of English for my benefit, and I turned to meet the candid gaze and charming smile of the retired major who had summoned me from a seat farther back to set me in the front row between the Mayor and the Pastor of Billingsfors. “Yes, indeed,” I replied, and wondered if the major of Ekeby in *Gösta Berling* had resembled him in stature and openness of countenance but took leave to doubt it, or the lady of the Manor, the former beauty Margareta Celsing, who was (I remember) a Swedish Finn, would certainly not have been driven out into the winter snow because of the escapades of those lovable but rascally cavaliers she was sheltering for charity's sake, to seek her bread on the long and at that time primitive roads of Värmland.

After a fairly lengthy address to the multitude by the “predikant and komminister” who looked somewhat preoccupied, perhaps because of his public registration duties which encroach greatly

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for this translation to the Minister of the Evangelical Church in England, the Rev. E. George Pearce.

on the leisure of Swedish clergymen, the afternoon's events began with a sort of eurythmic *Ling* display by the girl athletes of Dalsland, and this was followed by a similar display by the Bohuslän maidens. Four long poles with cross-bars, looking like Rugby goalposts with movable bars, served as the platform and stage for a remarkable exhibition of skill and grace, again a feast of beauty. Pairs vaulted lightly on to the bars, there struck a pose with heads thrown back and an arm and a leg raised, and so remained while the band played some catchy refrain. Then, breaking down the tableaux, they sprang agilely back on to the grass to make way for the next competing couples. As they struck their poses their long fair hair fell in springy avalanches from their heads, and the vivid blue and white of their tunics were like embroidery against that blue sky; in truth they recalled their Greek counterparts racing like Atalanta in competition for the coveted laurel crown over the flat "Idrottsplatsens" of ancient Delphi, Cos, or Corinth. . . .

The Director of Gymnastics had a figure like a ramrod and watchspring combined. Wearing a cream sweater and white shoes, and white flannel trousers with knife-edge creases, he moved with back straight as a poker; and yet, as he walked or marched, all the strength and energy of the man seemed to bounce lightly over the grass like a perfectly blown rubber ball. He was the high priest of athleticism, the apostle of physical fitness, not the least of the benefits conferred by modern Sweden on all mankind.

Now came vaulting and running events by teams from Mellerud—in Dalsland as we know—and Uddevalla, in the heart of Bohuslän, the former Vikingland, followed by another general march-past and dispersal, after which everybody repaired to a cluster of wooden buildings by a lake, where members of the Swedish Lotta (*Porgamentoon*) in long grey dresses were serving hot meals in order of queueing, the only outdoor queue for food I saw in Sweden.

The lake water looked tempting, and so collecting the swimming shorts I had brought along in a pocket I enquired of a neighbour at table if he could indicate a hut where a stranger

could change and thus be enabled to bathe in the lake before eating. He pushed aside his plate at once and led the way down an incline to a door where girls with streaming wet hair and clinging costumes were disappearing through a porch carrying towels.

"Come along," he cried, with Scandinavian unconcern and one foot scarce halted on the sacred threshold, calling out in Swedish to those within: "Engelsman can change in here, can't he?"

But any fond trepidations were soon ended by a chorus of perfectly calm "*Nej—Nejs*" from the inner sanctum, and instead we were directed to the vestibule of the Lottas' kitchen, where I rapidly changed behind the door to the tune of a scrambling of pots and pans.

A minute later I was poised at the extreme end of a jumping-board enjoying the view of the wide expanse of gleaming lake and the forested shores beyond. Then, taking a deep and loving breath and raising my arms as high as I could to Frey or Olympian Zeus, I plunged ecstatically into the lake's cool and refreshing deeps. . . . The world was well lost.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "These last days we have got quite a lot of snow, so we go ski-ing now. The country is beautifully dressed in a dazzling white coat. I wish you could see Dalsland in Winterdress, it is so beautiful!" (Miss Rådström, writing on January 9, 1947.)

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TOWN THE DEVIL FOUND DULL

*Longfellow's 'Evangeline' is fundamentally Scandinavian, for when Longfellow is describing the scenery, the customs and the people of Arcadia, he is simply describing Sweden.*

ROBERT LIEDER, introduction to Longfellow's translation of *Frithiof's Saga*

WHEN I RETURNED to Bengtsfors from the Gymnastik-festen, the Town Clerk invited me to take tea at his home—a spacious bungalow raised on piles on a green slope above the town, which recalled the typical Queensland home. “I have French ancestry,” he remarked, opening up the new and spick-and-span Town Hall for my inspection, “that is why I am dark and short.” His wife, however, was tall and of that easy Nordic carriage which makes Swedish ladies when travelling abroad (I have been told by one), and particularly in France, feel like bears! She was nice, as she poured out real tea into elegant cups and handed round a bewildering variety of confectionery as we sat on the balcony enjoying the afterglow of the sun and the view over the town and the canal to the Gammalgård. A son, Åke, and a daughter whose name I have forgotten, subdued but happy and very polite, both under ten and with corn-coloured hair, proffered signed prints of themselves.

The manager of the Hotel Ellers gave a knock at an early hour the next morning, when even the birds were still sleeping, and carried my case to the bus for Åmål which stood waiting in the town square, and waved goodbye as it moved off and crossed the bridge. There was nothing to pay, he had said—a valediction quite often heard by aliens in this land of generous hospitality, but one which never lost its attraction for me as among the most mellifluous phrases in the English or Swedish tongues!

From a front seat in the bus, which was only half-full at that hour in the morning, an uninterrupted view was obtainable of the wooded landscapes on both sides of the road and the occasional

halts during the hour's journey to the only town in Dalsland. For, except for groups of bungalows, or a Stores, at rare intervals, the route traversed open country, where regiments of trees alternated with the letter-boxes and milkstands of farms, just as they do in the King Country of New Zealand's north island.

At one halt a schoolgirl got into the bus and took a seat opposite the driver who was a friend of hers, it seemed, for they chatted away together with the utmost interest and animation. When the driver, turning his merry eyes on the girl, made some sally or other in the rich and musical Gothic lingo of these parts she would burst out laughing, and then respond teasingly, her remarks in their turn evoking loud guffaws from the driver. It was a pretty picture and a heartening one, with the *fröken* sharpening her wit on the mature and benevolent mind of a familiar and trusted mentor, himself obviously flattered by the child's charm and attentiveness and reacting fully to the occasion by a half-bantering, half-paternal manner. At another halt she jumped out with a final flash of girlish wit and a peal of laughter which sent a tingle down my spine, and was soon lost to view as the bus swerved round a bend and we came in sight of some portion of the 2150 square miles of Lake Vänern, the largest lake in Europe outside Russia, with Lake Vättern a good second.

Not long afterwards we glided into the great market-square of Åmål, which I saw at once (as Hilaire Belloc did at Flavigny in *The Path to Rome*) was a place on which a book might easily be written. Here a uniformed page-boy from the Grand Hotel of the Dalsland capital suddenly appeared from nowhere, and seizing my case beckoned me to follow him, which I thereupon did past purling and murmuring streams and a leafy park until we came to an elegant white building with box-hedges and yellow sun-blinds which I took to be a chateau or residence of some local nobleman, but which it transpired was the Stads-hotellet. Into this he led me, after climbing a fine flight of steps, and handed me over to the hotel manager, also short and dark and of Huguenot ancestry, as he revealed later, who gave me a room on the first floor with a wonderful view across a stream and a park with towering chestnut trees in full blossom and masses

of white and purple lilac, and then produced two bicycles on which we proceeded to "do" the sights of the town. . . .

An air of unhurried age, of amplitude in the affairs of life, and of benignant serenity speaks from the very stones of Åmål. It is impossible to visualise any husbands beating their wives in this pleasant capital, or any acrimonious arguments about politics or what have you at street corners. The town lies on the west shores of Vänern, only forty-six miles east by south of Frederikshald, or Halden, where, as I have said and now repeat, the prodigious Charles XII, whose full-length portrait by David von Krafft at Gripsholm is one of the most remarkable "psychological" portraits I know, found a soldier's death at the head of his war-weary army at the age of thirty-six, fifteen of which he had spent in the field, fourteen of them outside Sweden.

The mellow and translucent glow of the northern sun paints in cadmium and light gold the wide, leafy thoroughfares, the charming old-fashioned homes, the spreading parks and gardens, and the market-square huge enough to stage a coronation. And the inhabitants, whose expressions are calm and without the mad tensions of modern times, move with unhurried, nay I may say with stately dignity, as befits immortal souls wearing for such a brief space of time this plagued and mortal frame.

I have been told that persons of both sexes are to be found in Sweden (although it is difficult to credit this) who roundly declare that Åmål is dull and boring, and who will tell you uninvited that when the Devil was visiting Sweden in 1908 to see what souls he could trap—and how disappointed he was!—he made this town his last place of call, staying there, in fact, a little less than three minutes, and then exclaimed in a fury of frustration: "Get something!" afterwards continuing beyond the Baltic, where it is said that he now resides.

For my part I say a truce to such denigration of sheer urban goodness. When I reached Stockholm I told Prince Wilhelm at a party that I had left my heart in Åmål, which certainly took His Royal and Literary Highness by surprise, for he exclaimed as we sipped coffee and ate cream cakes beneath the towering canvases

of Rembrandt, Jordaens and Caravaggio: "But English people never go there!" Well, the more foolish they, is all I can say.

Åmål, which has doubled its population in thirty years to the great total of seven thousand, has achieved its present wide and deserved prosperity since the construction in the middle of last century of the still privately owned Bergslagen railway system through Värmland and Dalarna to Stockholm, which links up somewhere, but I forget where, with the Västerås system. . . .

With the hotel manager, who told me as we pedalled along the sunny highways of Åmål that he loved camping out and that he had lived some years also in America returning to Sweden at the time of the Great Depression, I cycled first to a timber factory beside a small quay where a Dutch ship was loading prefabricated houses.

What poetry there is in the clean, sappy smell of sawn timber lying in the sun by a lake! I do not always agree with other travellers, preferring to let impressions and opinions grow in my own inner consciousness, not infrequently, like the great Goethe, "in the midst of hot abundant tears", but I subscribe to the lyrical outburst of the traveller from this country who wrote that he loved "the fragrance of growing trees, of floating logs and of cut lumber that pervades the Bergslagen route and assails you whenever you open your compartment window".

In a bright and spruce—the exact word!—ante-room of the offices we waited while a youth went in search of the factory owner, who had only that morning (or the previous day—but what do a few hours matter in such a narrative as mine?) returned from a two-months' visit to the United States with which, I gathered later, he had been mightily impressed. While we took our ease in ample arm-chairs as children of the sun, I observed through the glass partition another fair, blue-eyed youth in the adjacent room lean confidentially across to a fragrant-looking typist, and his sibilant whisper reached my ears through the half-open door—"Engelsman!" Happy land, where the unexpected arrival of a foreigner, an Englishman, at a lakeside timber factory is hailed with such secret and lyrical relish!

The factory owner now appeared, a tall, powerful-looking



Swede, another ex-army major, smiling broadly and namesake of the notable local philosopher who is buried in a garden of Åmål, Vitalis Norström. Thrusting a weighty stick on the ground with each stride, he led the way into immense workshops where skilled carpenters and artisans were prefabricating urgently needed houses for the homeless of England, Holland, and other war-ravaged European States.

"I have received complaints from England," he said, "that many of my houses have been badly raised, and in some cases ruined; but what can you expect when your Government refused to let any of my experts land even for a day to demonstrate?" That, I thought, is the "closed shop" policy carried to inane lengths right enough, and a gratuitous discourtesy to Sweden into the bargain.

We cycled through the upper quarters of the town, past tidy and prosperous-looking villas set in pleasant gardens, and through a pine forest overlooking the lake whose rough, rock-strewn tracks were scattered with aromatic pine-cones and needles; then hastened back to the hotel for lunch, which I discovered I was to enjoy as the guest of the factory manager and his charming wife who, with their two children, a boy and a girl, were already seated awaiting our return.

In the afternoon another Åmål business man I had never met or heard of in my life embarked me in his fine and shining motor-boat for an hour's cruise on the lake and entertained me afterwards at dinner with his wife, an American lady from Detroit who said that I was the first Englishman they had seen in six years. "The greatest mistake you English ever made was in not paying back your debt to America after the first World War," roundly declared my host, with the utmost amiability.

"But we had to write off ourselves the equivalent millions," I explained, "for credits and munitions furnished to our allies, especially to Russia which still owes us something like six hundred million pounds sterling."

"Well," he replied, "you should have made that clear, for nobody in the States knows anything at all about it. They are men of business over there." And I remembered President

Coolidge's cool reply when asked by some kind-hearted American if Britain ought to be let off repaying the loan: "Wahl, they borrowed it, didn't they? Borrowers pay!" Russia and France, in particular, kindly note.

In Ornäs Park is the cultural museum of Åmål and a sports ground built on a site considered to be the most imposing in Sweden—and that is saying a lot. A stone's-throw beyond is a swimming beach affording a glorious view across the lake, and there I spent a pleasant hour on my last day in Dalsland immersing myself in the clear and enticing water and doing pedalling exercises in the sun on a lonely wharf.

There was a fair in the great market-place. Peasants in from the surrounding countryside were selling large bunches of lilies-of-the-valley, which grow wild in Sweden, and grape-purple violets and snowy narcissi. A gypsy tent of identical shape and hue with those camel-hair encampments which the North Africa Bedouin have lived in since the dawn of time stood at one corner, and here painted and bedecked youths and maidens were inveigling people inside to have their fortunes told.

Before another stall (stalls loaded with fruit, chocolate and toys were exercising an irresistible attraction on groups of big-eyed youngsters) a scattering of brightly clad children stood solemnly and ecstatically demolishing ices in tall cones. A young fröken, pretty as a flower and with a smile like the sunrise, stood under a canopy selling the delectable fare to the profit of some local charity. When my turn came round she handed me a cone with a miniature Matterhorn of dissolving vanilla; and then glanced down intelligently at my open purse, in which lay bright new kroner and some small change in öre.

"*Twenn-ti fife!*" she sang out, giving the stranger a golden smile as she selected a perforated coin and dropped it lightly into a cashbox. The music of that accent and fresh sweetness of her glance, were worth several dollars, or at any rate pounds sterling. Yes, I could have kissed that Nordic lass, and perhaps would have done so had she been more accessible—for Sweden is a tolerant, broad-minded land where even ordinary daily life is allowed sometimes to be lyrical.

# THROUGH CENTRAL SWEDEN

## CHAPTER V IN THE STOCKHOLM EXPRESS

*Life is not a spectacle or a feast; it is a predicament.*

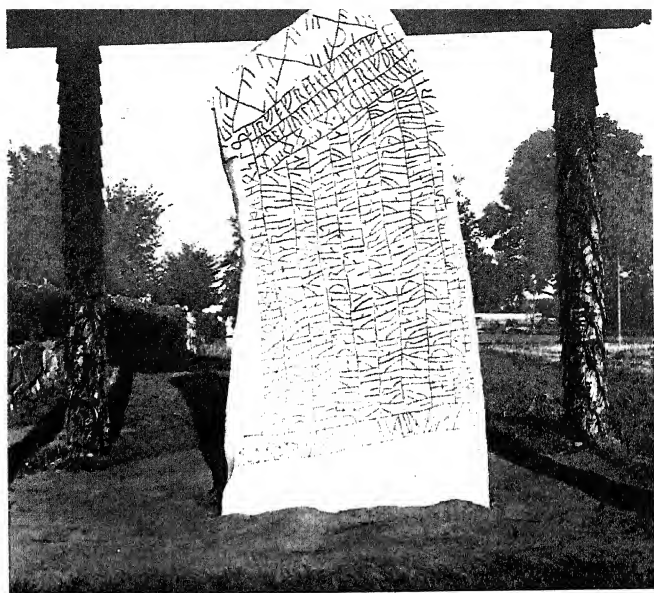
GEORGE SANTAYANA

THE EXCELLENT STADSHOTELLET page-boy who had met me on arrival at Åmål preceded me into the Stockholm *snälltåg* when I left, and placed my case in the luggage-rack above the corner facing-seat in a well-upholstered carriage which may have been a First but I think was a Second. A moment later, with a touch of his peaked cap, he was gone, and there was no time to reward him for his courtesy. But I sent an offering later through the Turistbyrå at Gothenburg, and as it did not come back I must assume it was accepted.

As the express started to glide out of the broad and tidy station, I settled down in the corner with a copy of the illustrated weekly, *Vecko-Journalen*, which there had just been time to buy, with some chocolate and fruit, at the station bookstall. On the cover was the picture of a Finnish dancer appearing in a light opera, "Dubarry", at Stockholm's Royal Opera House. Tall, marble-pale and sinuous as a Circassian, clad in breast-band and satin slips, she seemed to be tripping in her high-heeled shoes right out of the cover-page, and that moving epitaph of Callimachus in the Greek Anthology suddenly came to life—"Vagrant Simon offered these gifts to Aphrodite; her own portrait, the band that kissed her breasts, her torch, and the thyrsi she once waved, poor soul, sporting on the mountains"—and suddenly I remembered an hour at Melos beside a Dorian well and the sun-sequined sea.

Delving in a pocket for a cigarette, I was delving unfruitfully in another for a match when a fellow-passenger reading the voluminous sheets of the *Svenska Dagbladet*, the "Times" of





Runensteinen i Sigtuna, Upsala län.



Sweden, rose to disturb some wrappings in the lower rack—for all Swedish railway carriages have double racks, the top for heavy and the lower for light articles—and after handing me a box of Swedish matches sat down again without a word and resumed reading.

As we speeded smokelessly through deeply wooded landscapes I lit up and returned the box with an expression of thanks to the folding table raised between us, and as the placid and lonely lakes of Västergötland swam into view, I stole a glance at my sole companion on this long train journey.

She was not another Barbro; that at least was discernible. Yet there was a sort of antique grace about the occupant of the opposite seat, with that seemingly invulnerable calm which all Swedish women have, and a direct and unafraid gaze from tranquil eyes which was most refreshing after the "signs of weakness, signs of woe" evident in the expressions of so many fellow-passengers in England since the victorious end of the recent World War which so nearly finished world wars.

A woman she was, but young, "tvenn-ti fife" perhaps. Not beautiful, not even pretty by average standards—but charming, and with an elegance and poise which lifted the heart. She had a white blouse on—not one of those bishop-sleeve white silk things that the waitresses of all Swedish hotels and restaurants wear, and which communicate such a pleasant sense of hospitality and coolness—no, but a muslin blouse which somehow retained its fashionable lines whichever way she turned, and with elegant lace at the wrists and at her shapely throat; she also wore a well-cut skirt, smart beige-coloured nylons and fashionable shoes. Her plastic waterproof drooped from a hook, and a chic straw hat with Kate Greenaway brims rested above it in the top rack. Full lips were slightly tinted with rouge, the only make-up she permitted herself, seemingly.

Presently she lowered her 24-page newspaper to gaze impersonally out of the window at a regiment of silver birches, all standing to attention as if on parade, as we sped onwards to Kil, the most important railway junction in Värmland (for we were now out of Västergötland), and where the State-run Stockholm-Oslo

line crosses the privately owned Bergslagen railway. Leaning over the folding-table she would glance every now and then at a leaflet containing a map of our route with a list of all the stopping places between Gothenburg and Stockholm, times of arrival, and their respective distances from each city; and, waxing bold, I asked if I might look, too. She passed the leaflet over at once, and then gazed impersonally again at rolling, flower-decked meadows, a cosy-looking, red-ochre farmstead, and a distant low, tree-lined lake—the quintessence of Värmland's lyrical and lovely land. A half-smile hovered on her lips like that of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre, whose enigmatic radiance conceals perhaps more than reveals the wisdom of Eve.

I noted the glamorous names of the stations and then traced on the map with a pencil the route followed by the *snälltåg*. . . .

"Do you live in Stockholm?" I asked presently, as it seemed time that one of us asked something.

"No, at Trollhättan I live," she replied with a nice accent; then added, as if in afterthought: "My husband is at Falun."

Oh, so she was a Trollhättan girl, from that deeply wooded and bright township in the mountains above Gothenburg, "The Witches' Cap" whose falls, famous since pagan times, now supply the entire province with electricity. Years before I had walked from the Göta canal steamer to the mighty power-station to inspect the giant dynamos, and to compare them with those in the great power-plants near the Zugspitze, in Bavaria, and at El Chorro, near Malaga, in far Andalusia (where there is also a gorge immense enough to strike terror into the hearts of anyone afraid of heights, of whom I am one, and Mr. Belloc is another).

She was married, too, and her husband was at Falun, historic capital of the splendid province of Dalarna—at Falun, the subterranean spaces of whose copper mine, worked since the thirteenth century and at one time the richest in the world, measure one and a half times the area of that mighty pyramid of Cheops at Gizeh, which, with its less mighty neighbours, is all that one sees—barring the Sphinx and the vast desert—until Saqqarah is reached, with its sarcophagi of sacred cows and the lesser pyramids. Possibly, I reflected, he was a mining engineer working in those

fabulous shafts of the "Stora Kopparbergs gruva" which continue to this day to be worked under a royal charter dating back to A.D. 1270; perhaps in the deepest of them, reaching some 340 metres beneath the earth's level, where an employee was trapped in 1670 and discovered forty-nine years later so well preserved by the trickling vitriol that he was identified by his widow.

She had just told me that she was twenty-four, and that she was learning Spanish, when an attendant passed down the corridor sounding for *Middag* the sweetly ringing "musical-box" chimes which I had last heard sounded in place of a gong on the *Tukurini Maru* bound from Yokohama to Tilbury.

We rose together, and as there was nobody near to render either of us self-conscious or unduly deferential, we sought the dining-car and sat down at the same table where, like brother and sister (as I prefer to think), we enjoyed our meal in company and talked a little from time to time, and in the silences looked out on the lovely heart of Sweden. I drank the good Swedish öl,

"Grandchild of Ceres, Bacchus' daughter, which frames the march of Swedish drum . . ."

but she milk, a fine creamy milk, like that which the cows of Hyperion must have yielded on the Island of the Sun which, as every reader will remember, were killed for meat by the headstrong crew of Odysseus who afterwards perished to a man from the wrath of Zeus, only the resourceful and cunning King of Ithaca being washed up by the gods after the dire shipwreck of his "black ship" on Ogygia, the home of the fair goddess Calypso.

Back in the compartment after our respective reckonings—for she would not permit a single accounting—she accepted an invitation to occupy my corner facing-seat, as Calypso herself might have done, with me alongside, just as I had sat beside Barbro only a few days before on the way to the Dalsland lakes and remote Bengtsfors. I produced some fruit, and we ate those wonderful Jamaican bananas which only Sweden seems to import, huge and of such a firm lusciousness as we have not sampled in England for a decade.

What an extraordinary compliment she was paying me by such friendly response to a foreigner of whose very name and place of



birth she was ignorant—for in the courteous land of Sweden a formal introduction, I knew well enough, is ordinarily the indispensable prelude to conversation.

"I am sorry," I said, "you will excuse my forgetfulness." And I announced my name—such as it is.

"And mine," she replied simply, "is Ingrid."

Well, that was that. She turned away and looked for a time out of the window, her bow-like lips resuming once more their tantalising, Mona Lisa smile; while I joined in a silent struggle with my right arm, which was demanding independent action. Certainly, those trim shoulders encased in white crimped muslin and that slender, Gothic waist so incredibly near were enticing enough to tempt a misanthrope. But Ingrid must have sensed the peril of the moment, the imminence of an extraordinary manifestation of Anglo-Saxon lyricism, for raising herself slowly from the arm-rest she returned to her corner, letting fall two words which I can only record here with wonder and reverence. "Not—now!" she said (and I have never been able to make out whether they were intended as rebuke or encouragement), and I understood the meaning implicit in the argument of that philosopher (but whether Swedish or of some more prosaic race I know not), who declares somewhere that "the air of Sweden is still pure and undefiled". Even the *air*.

Not—

now . . . .

It was a poem, a *No*-poem, and Ingrid was Nausicaa, who had come with her maids and the royal linen for washing in a noble river by the Phæacian shore. "*When they had rinsed them till no dirt was left, they spread them out in a row along the sea-shore, just where the waves washed the shingle clean when they came tumbling up the beach.*" (And this mode of cleansing Djerban women in Tunisia practise to this day on the sea-shore, beyond their gleaming dream-capital of Houmt-Souk.)

Next, after bathing and rubbing themselves with olive-oil, they took their meal at the riverside, waiting for the sunshine to dry the clothes. And presently, when mistress and maids had all enjoyed their food,

they threw off their headgear and began playing with a ball, while Nausicaa of the white arms led them in their song. It was just such a scene as gladdens Leto's heart, when her daughter, Artemis the Archeress, has come down from the mountain along the high ridge of Taygetus or Erymantus to chase the wild boar or the nimble deer, and the Nymphs of the countryside join with her in the sport. They too are heaven-born, but Artemis overtops them all, and where all are beautiful there is no question which is she. So did this maiden princess stand out among her ladies.

When the time came for Nausicaa to set out for home after yoking the mules and folding up the clothes, the bright-eyed goddess Athene intervened once more and arranged for Odysseus to wake up and see this lovely girl who was to serve as his escort to the Phæacian city. Accordingly, when the princess passed the ball to one of her maids, she missed her and dropped it instead into the deep and eddying current. At this they all gave a loud shriek. The good Odysseus awoke, and sitting up took council with himself. "Alas!" he sighed, "What country have I come to now?" . . .<sup>1</sup>

And then the maids, having been checked in panic flight at the sight of a man—which still happens on Djerba—"on the ground beside him laid a cloak and tunic for him to wear, and giving him some olive-oil in a golden flask they suggested that he should wash himself in the running stream. But the gallant Odysseus demurred. 'Ladies,' he said, 'be good enough to stand back over there and leave me to wash the brine myself from my shoulders and rub my body with olive-oil, to which it has long been a stranger. I am not going to take my bath with you looking on.'" At Billingsfors it was the maids who were modest, and on the sea-shore of Phæacia it was much-enduring Odysseus. . . .

"Madam," I said, as Ingrid settled herself down in her corner, recollecting, I warrant, nothing at all of Homer—"this is the best honeymoon journey a man could wish for." The half-smile

<sup>1</sup> From *The Odyssey*, a new translation (and in my opinion the best, better than Butcher and Lang and better than T. E. Lawrence) by E. V. Rieu (Penguin Classics), pp. 104-5.—We may be mighty fine fellows in this age, able to fly the Atlantic in 8 hours and split any number of atoms and populations—but we cannot forge a style of the gods like this.

deepened, and presently she took some unfinished woollen garments from a handbag and started knitting, with deft sweeps and swerves of her fingers and her long green plastic needles. "*The most beautiful of sights is a woman bending over her work—or over her child.*"<sup>1</sup>

"You are a mother, then?"

"Yes," she said, raising her clear eyes momentarily, and meeting my gaze without a flicker. The mite was a year old.

"Then I must behave myself," I said; "I just dote on babies."

And I remembered the power of their tiny hands, and heaven's innocence in their big eyes, and the clever way they screw nose and mouth together simultaneously, as if made of gutta-percha.

The train, which all the way from Årnål seemed to have glided effortlessly across the fair land, like a well-directed king-piece in a

<sup>1</sup> *Stranger*. What is it you're always working at? You sit there like one of the Fates and draw the threads through your fingers. But go on. The most beautiful of sights is a woman bending over her work, or over her child. What are you making?

*Lady*. Nothing. Crochet work.

*Stranger*. It looks like a network of nerves and knots on which you've fixed your thoughts. The brain must look like that—from within.

*Lady*. If only I thought of half the things you imagine. . . . But I think of nothing.

*Stranger*. Perhaps that's why I feel so contented when I'm with you. Why, I find you so perfect that I can no longer imagine life without you! Now the clouds have blown away. Now the sky is clear! The wind soft—feel how it caresses us! This is Life! Yes, now I live. And I feel my spirit growing, spreading, becoming tenuous, infinite. I am everywhere, in the ocean which is my blood, in the rocks which are my bones, in the trees, in the flowers; and my head reaches up to the heavens. I can survey the whole universe. And I feel the power of the Creator within me, for I am He! I wish I could grasp the all in my hand and re-fashion it into something more perfect, more lasting, more beautiful. I want all creation and created beings to be happy, to be born without pain, live without suffering, and die in quiet content. Eve! Die with me now! This moment, for the next will bring sorrow again. . . . *The Road to Damascus*, a Trilogy by August Strindberg. English version by Graham Rawson. With an introduction by Gunnar Ollén (Jonathan Cape for the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation; 1939); Scene IV, "By the Sea", pp. 55-6.

game of bowls, now began to slow down and presently stopped in the interesting station of Katrineholm, in Södermanland, which I knew was one of the oldest tracts of land in the entire North where relics of settlements dating nine and ten thousand years back had been discovered. Near by, at a place called Flen, was the seventeenth-century manor of Stenhammar, the summer home of Prince Wilhelm (or "Pewe" as he is affectionately known to the Swedish intelligentsia, which means three quarters of the population), the King's younger son, who takes the title of his dukedom from the province.

Here, however, we did not remain long, but were soon gliding on to Stockholm and journey's end.

Seven hours had passed since I boarded the train at Åmål, yet I still occupied the compartment alone with Ingrid. Sometimes, at one or other of the rare halts, new passengers would glance from the corridor through the glass door, and seeing us together perhaps concluded that we were married, or on a honeymoon journey, for they always passed on.

After an afternoon repast in the dining-car of coffee and biscuits, real butter, and snippets of smoked ham, partaken to the lively chorus of chattering and laughter from a healthy-looking group of students, and a corn-haired, blue-eyed, keen-faced girl at an adjacent table, I returned to find a third party in the compartment, a burly Norwegian, without luggage and bare-headed, who smiled benignly upon me from behind rimless spectacles.

"For ten years I had a business in Bristol," he volunteered, as we approached Södertälje, in twilight, "I recognised that you were English from your jacket," he continued, "you could not buy one of that cut in a Swedish store. So I thought I would come in for a chat. I hope I am not intruding?"

"I have spent the best part of the day alone with a charming companion," I said; "I must not be selfish." The Norwegian smiled broadly, and as Ingrid went into the corridor to gaze out on the darkening landscape round the forested shores of Mälaren he remarked, alertly: "She is very nice. But she is married; she wears two rings." As we ran into the outskirts of the city he rose,

after informing me that "the Swede is a great gentleman", and left to seek his own compartment again.

Ingrid now took her plastic waterproof down and I helped her into it, so beautifully smooth and crisp and clean it was; and then lifted down her suitcases and placed them in readiness near the corridor.

The express from Gothenburg ran into Stockholm's Central Station and slowly came to a halt. There were the labels bearing their owner's full name and Stockholm address, loosely tied to the handles of the cases. It could be the enterprise of a moment to memorise them: or with a touch of that slender waist, or with burning words now seeking to be spoken, to suggest another meeting. . . . But she was married (and so was I); she had a baby—and Swedish babies are lovely mites. . . .

I handed out her luggage to a porter standing below the compartment window beside a young man wearing a light raincoat and a felt hat—Ingrid's brother, no doubt.

She gave one glance from her candid eyes, paused almost imperceptibly before saying "Good-bye", and offered a handshake. Then she got out, and I watched the group threading their way through the crowds towards the main hall of the station.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A violin am I with all of music's treasured riches;  
You can tune and bid it play you what you will  
And as you will.

Turn from me!—ah no, turn *toward* me! Let my heart be freezing,  
burning.  
Half of springtime, half of autumn, I am joy and am desire,  
All my strings are tense before you; make them sing then,  
Mad with yearning,  
In a last triumphant rapture all my years of amorous fire!

Till it lulls, and in the twilight your departing form  
I see, love,  
You the last to come for youth to me before the skies grow cold."

Erik Axel Karlfeldt—Translated by Charles Wharton Stork  
(University of Minnesota Press, 1938).

Another adventure had come and gone. . . .

*Look thy last on all things lovely,  
Every hour. Let no night  
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber  
Till to delight  
Thou hast paid thy utmost blessing;  
Since that all things thou wouldst praise  
Beauty took from those who loved them  
In other days.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Walter de la Mare.

## ISLAND OF SAGAS

*Gotland, my springtime land!* GUSTAV LARSON

### CHAPTER VI

#### THE CRETE OF THE BALTIC

*The soil of Gotland has yielded no less than 22,902 Arabic coins. Of English and Irish coins of the eighth century until 1150, thirty thousand have been unearthed in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and almost half of them were found on the island of Gotland.*

HENRY GODDARD LEACH, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, p. 36

IF TRAVEL HAS TAUGHT ME ANYTHING it is that Nature, like history, repeats herself; but it seems to my wondering mind none the less remarkable that the ancient and fabulous island of Gotland, in the Baltic, the largest island in the Swedish realm, should have a twin isle in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the ancient and fabulous island of Crete. On Gotland I was continually reminded of the veritable matrix of European civilisation, or of the islands of the Ægean.

To begin with, the summer climate of Gotland, dry and mild, the softest and sunniest in the Baltic region, is markedly similar to that of Crete, thanks to the illogical deviation of the Gulf Stream (how that benignant stream does get around!). Then its geological formation of silurian strata, marl shale, sandstone and limestone approximates to the geological strata of the island home of Minos; while the sight in late Spring of the great burgeoning chestnut and walnut trees, the mulberries and acacias, serve also to carry the recollection Mediterraneanwards, to the chestnut woods of Selino and the almond trees of Agrigento.

Moreover, the merchants who served the Roman emperors did trade with Gotland, it appears, almost as extensively as with Crete and Greece.

From the points of view of long inhabitation by man, of the richness of their legends, and of actual history too, Crete and

Gotland possess a parallel interest. True, in the Northern isle no dazzling Knossos has been uncovered after three thousand years, with its magnificent painted halls, its double-axe symbol everywhere, its gypsum courtyards, its buried stores of immense *pitthoi* for oil and wine, gold and silver, and its thrilling throne-room in the Palace of Minos with the gypsum "leaf" throne: not to speak of the port of Amnisus mentioned in the *Odyssey* and whose ruins I have seen—unless we may describe as the "Knossos" of Gotland the very ancient and immensely strong fortress of Torsburgen, the scene, according to local report, of many stirring events in the life of the great pagan god Tor, or Thor.

But at Trojeborg, north of Visby, Gotland has its Bronze-Age Labyrinth, a winding pavement-way a hundred and twenty-five paces in length, obviously once connected with a religious cult, possibly with sun-worship (to which modern Gotlanders and their guests from the mainland are still heartily addicted), where ritualistic dances were held in the dawn of history, forerunners of the festival dances which take place there to this day on certain anniversaries, although there seem to have been no bull-leaping sports of captive Minotaur at Trojeborg.

Another curious parallel—Gotland shares with the sacred Ægean island of Delos the classical legend of sinking in the sea by day and rising to the surface again by night, possibly attributable to the fact that both islands have low shelving shores at certain stretches of the coast (how lovely is Delos approached from the south, with its dazzling white ruins on the flat shore-line, and that winding walk past the cave of Apollo up to Mount Cynthos).<sup>1</sup>

But what is most interesting and significant of all links with the Mediterranean, a colony of the Gutar, forced to migrate from

<sup>1</sup> "It is related of the isle of Delos, lying in the middle of the fair ring of the Cyclades in the Ægean Sea, that it was not attached to the bottom of the sea, but floated about helpless amidst the waves, until one day it suddenly emerged and offered a haven to the fleeing Leto, who had been wandering about helpless under the constant persecutions of the jealous and vengeful goddess Hera. It was here, on the isle of Delos, that Leto, the mistress of Zeus, gave birth to Apollo and Artemis. And after that, the Greek myth goes on to relate, Delos never sank again." *An Isle of Sagas* (published in Gotland), by John Nihlén, to which I am indebted for certain other data in this chapter.



the island in the fifth century because of overpopulation, sailed over the Baltic and right through Russia along the river Duna to the Black Sea and on to Hellas, and settled in and around Athens by consent of the Emperor Anastasius, hundreds of whose gold *solidi*, bearing his likeness and superscription, have been turned up from the soil by Gotland farmers. Some island records say that an account of this epic journey was recounted centuries afterwards by a Scandinavian mentor named Wulfstan to Alfred the Great, who wrote it down in his Wessex stronghold and dated it before the union of the Gutar and Svear—whose descendants gave him such a lot of trouble defending the coasts of England—but my friend Dr. Gösta Langenfelt affirms that Wulfstan only told Alfred that Gotland belonged to Sweden. To this day over a thousand abandoned dwelling sites, *kämpagravar*, are to be found in the lush meadows of the island, of the exact length, sixty metres, mentioned in the Guta Saga which recounts the great migration. And on the Lion of St. Mark at Venice, which was brought from the Piraeus by the Venetians in the fourteenth century, there is a runic inscription commemorating a landfall in Greece by Vikings.

If some students of racial movements in prehistoric times are to be believed, these supernumary Gutar, by emigrating to Greece, were following the odyssey of their own legendary forebears who, in the age of the great migrations, had wandered from "Ultima Thule" right down to the Greek Archipelago and formed the parent stock of the Ionian and Dorian tribes, and inferentially the heroic race of the Hellenes. Be this as it may, there is undeniably a strong similarity of achievement in the expeditions of the Vikings and the ancient colonising Greeks, who wandered and settled all over the Mediterranean, and even got as far as Cadiz and—according to that eminent authority the late Stanley Casson—Cornwall.<sup>1</sup> As for physical similarities, and a continuation in the modern epoch of types recalling the sheer compelling physical beauty of the classical Greeks, I know of no people anywhere

<sup>1</sup> "The reader will be struck by the similarity of the customs of the Norsemen with those of the ancient Greeks as recorded by Homer and Herodotus." *The Viking Age*, vol. I.

who come so near to the Greek type and *statuesqueness*, as commemorated for us on ancient vases and marble friezes and statuary groups, as do the Swedes. Why, as I shall relate in the proper place, on a lonely, lakeside road in Värmland I came one sunny afternoon upon the young Apollo himself. He was fishing.

But quite irrespective of any historical or physical links or affinities with the Mediterranean civilisations, Gotland is without question one of the most enthralling islands in the world—an island of memorials of all epochs, an island of wonder, legend and enchantment, like Sicily, Malta, Trinidad, and the Grand Canary; and in its capital, Visby, it possesses a gem of the medieval town intact and without peer in all Europe. . . .

In the writing-room of the comfortable and exciting Snäckgårdsbaden hotel, situated on a rise of the shore two miles north of Visby, the eyes of a good Scotswoman member of the P.E.N. suddenly swam as she enquired in June, 1946, if I had noted the loveliness of Swedish young womanhood.

(Marjorie Bowen, who was seated at the opposite desk writing, glanced up with a novelist's sudden, intenser interest, but I forget at the moment if she said anything.)

"I sat for hours outside a restaurant in Slussplan, and afterwards in those tulip-filled gardens off Vasagatan, just watching the girls walk past. What complexions! What elegance and style." Olaf Stapledon referred in an article contributed to *The New Statesman* on the 18th International P.E.N. Congress in Stockholm to "Nordic goddesses", and in truth there was a tall and fair fröken at the book-and-periodical stall at the Snäckgårdsbaden who could scarcely be described adequately by any other term. She was a model for Pheidias, for Praxiteles, and had she lived near Olympia (I mean the original one in Elis, and not the fun emporium at Earl's Court) Pheidias would have moulded her in Parian marble as a companion piece to his Hermes—which looks truly alive in the Olympia museum, as you catch the first sight of it from the haunted sward without.

The Snäckgårdsbaden was Gotland's "Palace of Alcinous", nearer the shore than the one described for our delight in Homer,

and the book-and-periodical girl (who smiled openly when I met her walking with a staff companion in the pine-groves above the sun-bathers' beach) was yet another Nausicaa.

In the early Middle Ages Gotland was a halting place for pilgrims bound for Jerusalem, after Christianity had reached the island from the mainland, but considerably later than the Viking era. (The Franciscan Order was firmly established in Scandinavia not many years after the death of St. Francis himself on the bare floor of his mud and wattle *Portiuncula* at Assisi; for the first missionary had penetrated centuries before to the islet of Birka, the former capital of the Svear in Lake Mälaren, and to-day within a motor-boat ride of the capital.)

One morning I joined a motor-coach tour to some of the ninety-two thirteenth-century village churches which remain intact and perfectly preserved to this day by the dry climate of the island—visual testimony not only to the piety but also to the immense riches of the Gotland yeomen and farmers in the Middle Ages, who were also sailor-merchants carrying on a vast trade with all the nations of northern and eastern Europe and with London, too.

These truly wonderful churches, an unfailing surprise and delight for a new visitor, and with as individual a style of architecture—reminiscent, in fact, of the German, Romanesque and French Angevine schools—as the lemon-yellow mosques of the Abadite Quaker Moslems on Djerba, are small in actual area, but their high gotlandic roofs and tapering towers, which served as look-outs against piratical raiders in former times, make of them landmarks everywhere. Many contain marvels and masterpieces of early religious art still virtually unknown abroad, such as the Oja crucifix which has been thus described by Prince Wilhelm in his fine work of literature, *This Land of Sweden*.<sup>1</sup>

. . . photographs had prepared me for something truly remarkable, but the impression it made was far stronger than I had ever dreamed of. Sunbeams fell slantingly in through the narrow windows, just

<sup>1</sup> Norstedt Söner Verlag, Stockholm, 1946 (Translated by Elizabeth Kjellberg), pp. 174-5.

enough, so that they did not fall directly on to the work of art itself but lightened the space near it, so that every detail stood out sharply and clearly. The imposing wooden crucifix, on its three chains, hangs directly under the triumphal arch. . . . The wonderful face is full of pain and also full of an unearthly nobility. The ends of the cross itself have been decorated with the symbols of the four evangelists and are girded by a strong circle upon which roses and slanting quadrangles form a decorative pattern. The angles between this circle and the cross-arms have been filled with figure compositions that show a lively imagination on the part of their creator. On top is a throng of sorrowful, praying angels in attitudes of deep despair, and at the bottom are two episodes taken from the history of the first couple God created. . . . The whole of the triumphal crucifix is a mass of pale tones and tints where bronze-brown, red, and green mingle with a subdued gold, all the colours flowing together into an impressive unity.

What a flood of creator's joy pours from this deeply religious work of art, which is, of its kind, possibly unequalled in all of Europe!

And then, humanist and humanitarian that he is, the royal author proceeds to draw a needed moral in this desperate epoch from such a consummate work of the spirit. "Why is beauty", he asks, "not allowed to play a larger role? Why do people not accept it like a precious gift, why do they not rejoice over all the beauty and goodness in the world instead of, in their blind discontent, drawing misery down upon themselves and their progeny? Why can they not unite in a mutual cause, something high and fine that can uplift them and which would make life—the only rich and blessed thing we have—more tolerable? . . . Let us cast off that which is ugly within us and pay more attention to that which, in the form of creative spirit, possesses some of truth's validity and unchangeableness. This would free, help, and save us from chaos."

Such words bring inevitably to mind Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

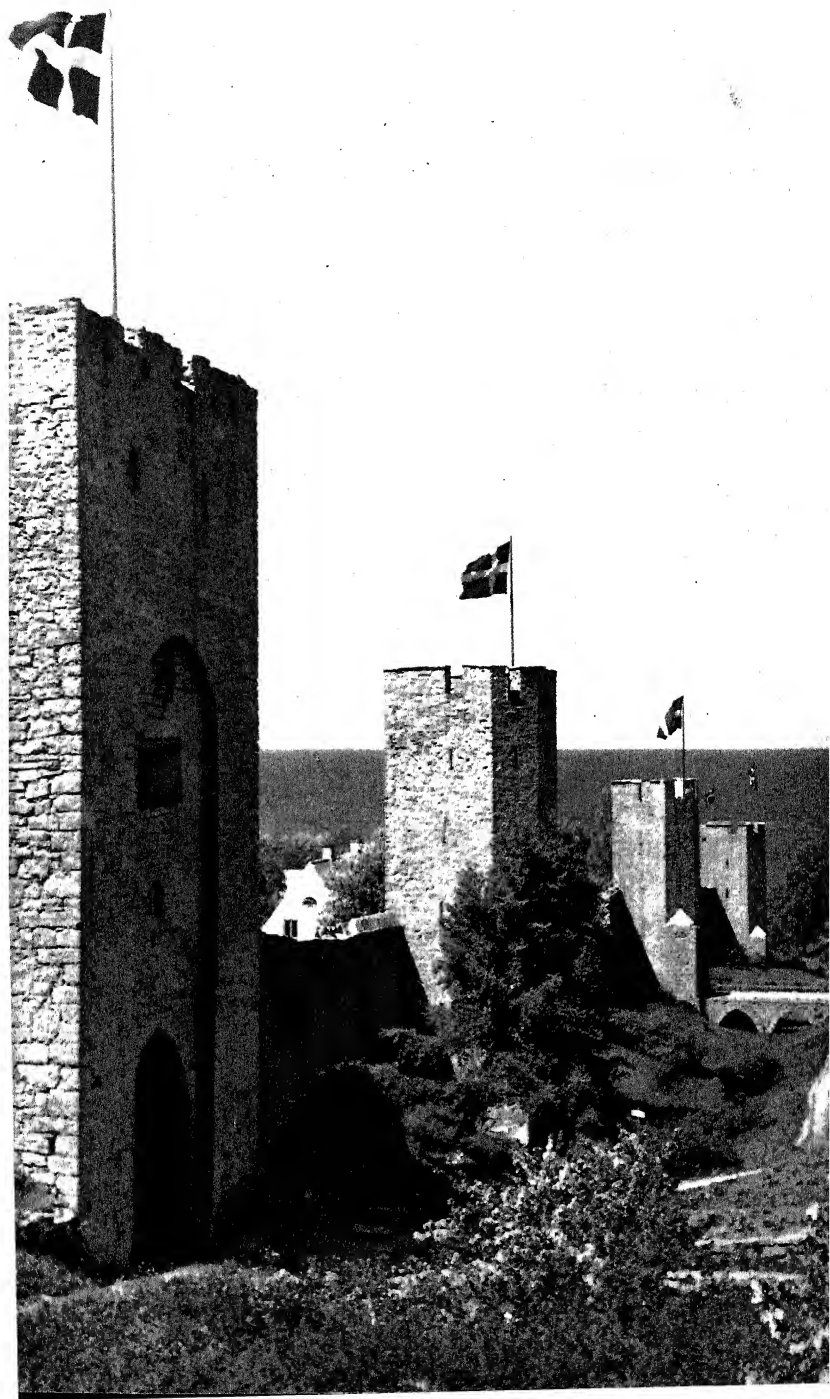
Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground,  
But only those who see take off their shoes.

While I stood savouring and enjoying this new and unexpected adventure among masterpieces, the high and vaulted roof of the nave seemed all of a sudden to resound with the song of some angelic choir; indeed, so pure were the notes that I sank down upon the nearest pew to let the harmonies take full effect. When the singing had ceased, turning to discover whence it had come, I saw the vocal daughter of Gotland's tourist chief stepping down with her mother from a rostrum below the belfry-tower on their way back to the coach. Only much later did I learn that sweet song and the love of music and harmony are part of the natural heritage of the islanders.

I lingered by the Oja crucifix, which is believed to have been executed by a wandering French ecclesiastical craftsman in the middle of the thirteenth century, and was rewarded this time by a living work of art—a charming ensemble made by one of our Stockholm guides, an Uppsala student familiarly known as “Anna-Marie”, who had thrown a kerchief of deep green over her head, as she stood statue-like in light blue summer coat, perfectly framed within the Romanesque portal of the sacristy.

At Bro church, dating back to 1300, we admired the Romanesque portal for its own sake (the church of Dalhem, with fine medieval paintings, is said to have been consecrated a century earlier); but Stångas church provided the greatest thrill after Oja, for here, immovably fixed to the main door-handle, was a Viking yard-measure of solid bronze and runic markings, whose only known companion piece is found in Persia—further and exceedingly interesting proof of the medieval roving of the island's farmer-sailors.

The beautiful landscapes and the island's rich pastures—in Spring and Summer one vast carpet of wild orchids and lilies—are silent litanies of praise to the lyrical fecundity of a benignant nature. On Gotland may be savoured in very truth the authentic *poetic* quality of this northern land, for there are to be found those delicious leaf-meadows, or, literally, “leafy-groves” (*löväng*)—lush fields of white clover, lilies, orchids, with a multitude of lesser-known wildflowers; and there too is still to be found that living link with the Viking Age, the *gårdsgård*, the old hand-made fence





and boundary of planed and sloping timber which has characterised Swedish rural landscapes for a thousand years and more, but which is now unhappily, albeit very slowly, yielding place on the mainland to wire fencing. A young man who sat beside me in the coach remarked that the *gårdsgård* is doomed after a few more years to complete disappearance, as soon no-one will have the skill and knowledge to lay them. This is sad news, for as when landing on Ithaca from a caïque in the immemorial Bay of Polis all Homer's world seemed to fill my imagination, so when I first came upon green sloping fields in Dalarna boundaried by the *gårdsgård* did the Viking epoch suddenly rise like a living historical panorama before that "inner eye" which Wordsworth so truly names as "the bliss of solitude".

Every mile of Gotland is a memorial from its crowded past, Stone Age, Bronze Age, the Viking period, the Christian era, the Danish domination, and the Modern epoch, and every village cherishes records, sagas and legends of earlier times. Gotlanders first seem to have taken up navigation and sea commerce some 3500 years ago, and the hundred and sixty odd tumuli found on the island, mostly ships' graves and large and magnificent at that, demonstrate that the Goths were widely voyaged and wealthy centuries even before the rise of the Vikings.<sup>1</sup>

At a place called Lojsta, a green and magical spot curtained by immense firs and pines and truly eloquent of the heroic age of Scandinavia, there is a *slott* or Great Hall of the Viking period, "a mighty mead-dwelling", as a similar hall is described in *Beowulf*, reconstructed above the actual stone foundations laid fifteen centuries ago, and it was a memorable experience to stand in its dark interior beneath the thatched and sloping Viking roof beside hoary stones blackened from domestic fires, and visualise the old Swedish dwellers setting out with their long boats with red prows curved in the semblance of a snake for a descent on the

<sup>1</sup> "33 Bronze Belt Plate. Langstrup, Jutland. Early Bronze Age, c. 1500-800 B.C. . . . The original models of the spiral style were brought to Denmark along the trade routes from the *Ægean*."—*Catalogue of Danish Art Treasures*, London, 1948.



coasts of England or the Isle of Man—where their runic stones are still to be found—or Ireland (for Dublin had its Viking kings, and in the ninth century the existing round tower at Glendalough, in Co. Wicklow, was attacked by the Danes and all its monk-refugees murdered), or bidding their wives and children farewell as they sailed on their Springtime enterprises to the Baltic states, the Bosphorus, or Greece.

It was on this significant site at Lojsta, too, that I made the highly interesting discovery that the Highland sport of “tossing the caber” was popular with the Vikings on Gotland, where it formed one of the principal features of their games, only that instead of long poles the contestants used actually to root up trees and run and toss them to the farthest distance possible. The sport must have been taken over to Scotland by the early Viking invaders.<sup>1</sup>

Gotland, island of sagas, was the reputed home of the great Scandinavian god Tor, and a vivid “pen-portrait” of him there is given in John Nihlén’s interesting publication (Gotland’s Turistförening, Visby):

### TORS’ JOURNEY TO ÖSTERGARNSHOLM

One night, as the owner of Hvidfelder Farm, at Kräklingbo, lay asleep in his shore-hut at Kräklingbo-hammaren before taking up the “strömning”-nets he had put out, the door of his hut slowly opened and the god Tor entered. Hvidfellen opened his eyes, and wonderingly raised himself on his elbow to look at his visitor. He had always been a fearless and cool-headed man, but here was something out of the ordinary!

Tor, observing his hesitation, greeted him calmly, seated himself on the edge of the bed and began talking about fishing. He then explained who he was and asked Hvidfellen if he would row him across to Östergarnsholm.

“No!” was the answer. “The wind is freshening, and one man alone can’t handle both rudder and oars.”

<sup>1</sup> “It was the afternoon; and the sports were all but over.

Long had the stone been put, *tree cast*, and thrown the hammer.”

*The Bothie of Toperna Fuosich* (A. H. CLOUGH)

"You take the rudder and I will row," said Tor.

So Hvidfellen agreed, and the boat was soon ready. Many a time Hvidfellen had made the trip across to the island, where he owned a fisherman's hut as well as salvage rights, but never before had he done the journey in so short a time, either with sail or oars. The boat leapt through the water.

Before they touched land at Utviken, Tor said it would be best if Hvidfellen kept his boat a little way off shore and awaited his return. Tor then ascended the rock past the long row of fishermen's huts. There he met a huge giant. Tor tightened his belt and grasped his hammer. The shaft was short, but the head was a veritable "skull-cracker".

Tor made straight for his adversary, and it was Hvidfellen's fortune to witness a single-handed combat the like of which had never been fought before. At last Tor smote the giant such a mighty blow that he sank to the ground.

On seeing the giant fall, Tor turned his back on him in order to return to the boat. The giant seized the opportunity to give Tor a violent kick on the leg. Tor pretended not to notice it and continued on his way down to the shore. On being hailed, Hvidfellen headed his boat inshore; but before he jumped in Tor said:

"Did you see who won?"

"Yes," answered Hvidfellen, "but I also saw who received the last blow!"

"You did, did you?" cried Tor; "You'll see, right enough!" And he ran back to the fallen giant and dealt him such a blow that there was not a spark of life left in him.

After an equally rapid homeward journey, Tor thanked Hvidfellen for his assistance, but said that he had no wherewithal to pay him. But he should not go unrewarded. Tor left the shore and went off towards Torsburgen.

On the second morning afterwards Hvidfellen found all his fishing nets full to the "noose", so he was well repaid for his trouble.

In the year 1361 the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag, having learned of the immense riches acquired by the Gotland merchants and wayfarers, whose sea-laws were now valid on all far-away waters from London to Novgorod, fell on the capital, Visby, which with his army of pirates and mercenaries brought over in ships

from the Kattegat, he conquered after a bloody battle with the heroic peasant defenders outside the walls. Thus ended the Golden Age of Gotland, for thereafter successive change of ownership—the island was restored to Sweden in 1645—brought a sharp fall in its fortunes, which has, however, been somewhat restored in modern times by tourist traffic.

But Visby deserves, and must be given, a chapter to itself.

## CHAPTER VII

### “THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE”

*Linne's opinion of the people of Visby was that they were "good natured and kind", and this still holds good . . . They take their personal sorrows and worries straight to the governor or the bishop.*

THIS LAND OF SWEDEN, pp. 179-80

THE FIRST AND LAST VIEW of Visby is for the great majority of visitors to Gotland the most memorable; I mean that view from the sea of a completely walled and miraculously preserved medieval town and port obtained on arrival and departure in one of the Gotland Company's friendly 1900-ton steamships, one of which, by the way, was sunk without trace and only two survivors during the 1939-45 war. For at Visby even more than at walled Avila or Carcassonne, the romantic charm and grandeur of a city famed far and wide in the Middle Ages are preserved intact. It is this "intactness", this unique architectural unity of homogeneous styles, which draws and holds like a magnet the traveller from the mainland.

Visby, or rather the site of Visby, was a notable trading place and emporium as early as the *end of the Stone Age*, and had flourishing commercial relations with far countries in the first century A.D. The present city, with a population of 12,507 (1941), dates back, however, only to the early Viking period, when it was a mart for the produce of Asia, Russia and Europe, having grown up on a former place of sacrifice—hence the Norse nomenclature, "*Vē*" and "*by*", "a town". But it is the old Hansa citadel that we see, with its cobbled and winding streets and lanes, its half-timbered houses and fine old patrician mansions, its old Apotheke, Apothecary house, whose step-gables are so typically Teutonic, whether of Lübeck or Nuremberg, and the magnificent 800-year-old Cathedral of St. Mary and the ten imposing church and abbey ruins in the town. All these "museum-pieces" of Hanseatic architecture are liberally enclosed within the superb city walls of

grey limestone mellowed by the ages which, when seen in late spring or early summer in a setting of towering chestnuts and blossoming lilac and the celebrated Visby roses, gives an air of absolute enchantment to a European sight of the first magnitude.

In Visby is to be seen and savoured, in fact, the gorgeous flower of medievalism, when architecture reflected gracious living, the opulence which followed boldness and enterprise, and the enjoyment of leisure which afforded ample rein to good taste and not to vulgar display as it does to-day. In any corner of Visby, from any lane or turning, the visitor is entranced by the harmonies of light and shade on white walls festooned with bougainvillea and creeper, by graceful arch and Gothic window, by the glorious tower-domes of St. Mary's, or the soaring arches of one of the other noble ruins—of St. Nicholas, for example, the former church of the Dominicans where a miracle play is performed each July, of St. Catherine's of the Franciscans, which was dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, of St. Clement's (the patron-saint of sailors), with a Romanesque nave and choir dating from 1215, and the fourth church erected on the site—all of whose venerable and austere columns and choring arches “limn mortality” as I wrote in a poem composed by Visby's sun-warmed walls.

The Cathedral, of hewn limestone, begun in 1190 but not consecrated until 1255, is, curiously enough (considering the berserk and iconoclastic tendencies of later invaders), the only undamaged church in Visby. It is bright, lofty and of a noble amplitude. Entering by the main door I found myself confronted by the mural tombstone of Eric of Pomerania who ruled Gotland for twelve years after losing, in 1436, his remaining three kingdoms, and, on the opposite wall, by a striking painting illustrating a New Testament scene, with a title-quotation which strangely has remained in the memory—“*Den på uppstanden*”. . . . but incorrectly, I fear, as a Swedish friend tells me the words mean nothing.

The wide nave was irradiated by the June sunlight, but not a soul was to be seen, not even the usual sacristan. So I found my way alone to the entrance to the tower, which I ascended by a rickety stairway and wooden platforms, which seemed far from safe, to the Church Mount, where was a party from Uppsala,

which included a visiting lecturer from Cambridge, all enjoying the superb panorama over the roofs and arches of the city to the sea, with the stone-grey walls and their forty square towers enclosing the view on either side.

I had often paused in the National Museum at Stockholm before an amazing historical painting by the great Swedish artist, C. G. Hellquist, depicting the sacking of Visby by Valdemar Atterdag, King Valdemar IV of Denmark, in 1361.<sup>1</sup> Valdemar is reputed to have gained mastery over the heroic city defenders because of the treachery of a goldsmith (“Guldsmed”), named Nils who, during a visit to Denmark with his daughter, told the king of Gotland’s fabulous wealth, or as the local ditty has it:

Nils Guldsmed went to the king and lied,  
The nasty traitor and horrid thief.  
These men of Gotland have more gold  
Than they are able to carry.  
The swine are eating from silver troughs  
And the women are spinning on cotton rods.

Valdemar is said to have made a preliminary inspection of the island disguised as a pedlar; to have obtained details of the strength of the fortresses at Visby from the daughter (who, legend has it, was afterwards immured by the enraged citizens in the Maiden’s Tower to die a lingering death) of a south Gotland farmer named Unghanse and to have made a compact with a witch to spare the country and the people if she would help him. By his treatment of Visby after conquering it he broke his promise (and how, as Americans say!) and the witch thereupon prophesied that the plundered treasure would never reach Denmark. And behold, when the piratical fleet sailed from Gotland, laden to the gunwales with booty, it met a terrible storm near Stora Karlsö island, off the west coast, and to-day a bird sanctuary, and all the Danish ships foundered, Valdemar himself only narrowly escaping drowning.

<sup>1</sup> So internationally renowned is this most dramatic picture that I received an excited enquiry by return of post from a Spanish geologist in Madrid to whom I had sent a postcard reproduction of it claiming familiarity with the painting and asking for a detailed description of the town.

The famous painting shows the vulpine king seated in all his barbaric magnificence in the main square of Visby, while the cowed citizens fill three large beer tubs with gold and silver and precious stones. Valdemar swore to raze Visby to the ground if the tubs were not filled within three days; when they were replete he proceeded to despoil the churches of their treasures. All these riches now lie, presumably, on the bed of the Baltic.

The real battle for the walled city, waged with the utmost ferocity, took place at the bridge of Ejmund at Masterby, a few miles from Västergarn where the Danes had landed. Here six hundred peasants fighting with native resolution and what arms they had been able hastily to gather perished to a man like the Spartans of Leonidas at Thermopylae and were later interred in a common burial-mound, still to be seen and only slightly larger than that noble mound of the Athenian dead who fell in the glorious defence of Marathon against the hordes of Xerxes. (Both mounds have been opened in modern times, Marathon to reveal carbonised bones and ashes, proving that the dead hoplites were all cremated before burial, and the Visby mound to yield up medieval armour and weapons and some works of art, with some skulls and bones.)

The next day, July 27, 1361, another eighteen hundred peasants—after the burghers (who remained within the walls) had followed a “scorched earth” policy and razed the outer town to the ground—offered a desperate resistance to the invasion, the first Gotland had known in its four thousand years of historic inhabitation, but all to no purpose. They, too, were cut down. The walls were breached, Valdemar entered the city, and men, women and children were indiscriminately slaughtered. “The Baltic Sea”, said a contemporary account, “seemed to become a sea of blood.” The stone cross put up in commemoration, or rather commiseration, of this dreadful day still stands at the Korsgatan, or cross-roads, in Visby; as do the stone pillars on the hill of Galperget (“Gallows hill”) where the bodies of pirates and malefactors were wont to hang.

In the Gotland Museum of Antiquities one day I passed an

“THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE”

exciting afternoon examining the “picture” gravestones of Viking chiefs with their incised delineations of the old Norse ships with square sails which could cross the North Sea in three days, and of the companies which sailed in them; and those hoards of Greek, Roman, Arabic, Erse and Anglo-Saxon coins which have been unearthed by the island’s yeomen farmers, brought back in exchange for cargoes of pitch and tar, limestone and salt, from Novgorod, Constantinople, the ports of the Caliphate, or from Dublin and Grimsby, “with furs and skins, wax and honey, with woven fabrics and silverware, spices and foodstuffs . . . Chinese cups and shells from the Indian Ocean”, as Hans Wählin tells us in his great work, *Visby and the Ancient Civilisation of Gotland*.

\* \* \* \* \*

As I sat enjoying an aperitif after the day’s exertions in the garden of one of Visby’s pleasant restaurants, an immense hullabaloo sounded from the street, and presently there came into sight, headed by Anna-Marie, a chain of students and light-hearted Congress members marching up the steps singing at the tops of their voices “*De brevitae vitae*”, the international student-hymn composed by Kindleben at Halle in 1781 and sung to a tune at least six centuries old:

“Gaudeamus igitur  
juvenes dum sumus!  
Post jucundam juventutem,  
post molestam senectutem  
: , : nos habebit humus : , :

Ubi sunt, qui ante nos  
in mundo fuere?  
Vadite ad superos,  
transite ad inferos!  
: , : Ubi jam? Fuere! : , :

Vita nostra brevis est,  
brevi finietur.  
Venit mors velociter,  
rapit nos atrociter,  
: , : nemini parcetur : , :



ISLAND OF SAGAS

Vivat academia,  
vivant professores!  
Vivat membrum quodlibet,  
vivant membra quaelibet,  
: , : semper sint in flores! : , :

Vivant omnes virgines,  
faciles, formosae!  
Vivant et mulieres,  
tenerae, amabiles,  
: , : bonae, laboriosae! : , :

Vivat et res publica  
et qui illam regit!  
Vivat nostra civitas,  
maecenatum caritas,  
: , : quae nos hic protegit : , :

Pereat tristitia,  
pereant osores!  
Pereat diabolus,  
quivis antiburschius,  
: , : atque irrisores!<sup>1</sup> : , : ”

It seemed particularly appropriate to haunted and immemorial,  
yet ever-young Visby.

<sup>1</sup> The complete text of “*De brevitate vitae*” was kindly sent me by Fröken  
Britt Arpi, director of the Hotel Siljansborg, Rättvik.

## VÄRMLAND—"ART AND IRON"

### CHAPTER VIII

#### LAND OF POETRY, LEGEND AND ROMANCE—I

*Ah, Värmland, my beautiful, my glorious Värmland!*

SQUIRE JULIUS in *Gösta Berling's Saga*

IT WAS A MORNING in early June—the day after I had encountered walking along the green banks of the blue Klarälven, where that lovely river flows into Vänern, my old friend the Postmaster of Jönköping,<sup>1</sup> whom I had not seen for seven long years. ("Thank you for the book of poems," he said; "how is your wife?") Golden sunshine streamed down from a radiant sky flecked with cirrus cloud; birds sang joyfully in the trees; dragonflies and kingfishers darted merrily over the breast of the silvery lake water. All the world, all life, seemed created for such an hour. . . .

I stood before a tombstone, in a corner secluded by juniper bushes of the outlying cemetery of "sunny" Karlstad, on the island of Tingvalla, beside the Norwegian wife of one of the Värmland capital's most notable citizens, French Consul there, a former friend of Selma Lagerlöf, and proprietor and guiding spirit of one of Europe's great hotels, the Stadshotellet at Karlstad.

"I am driving to visit my father-in-law's grave; would you care to come?" she had enquired, as I emerged from the breakfast room hung with Einar Nerman's fascinating "portraits" of characters from *Gösta Berling's Saga*. The invitation seemed such a natural one on a morning of springtime radiance, that I accepted without ado the vacant seat beside her and thoroughly enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> In Småland, and birthplace of the poet, historian and philosopher Viktor Rydberg—and also the centre of the Swedish Match Industry, the Svenska Tändsticks Aktiebolaget.

the drive out to the necropolis along one of those broad tree-lined thoroughfares for which the province is famed.

Side by side we stood in the solemn presence of "Sister Death", and I asked my companion the meaning of the elegiac lines incised below a name and a date:

Bred Dina vida vingar  
 O Herre över mig,  
 och låt mig stilla somna  
 och vakna upp hos Dig.

"... 'Spread thy wings over me, O Christ,' she translated, 'and let me quiet (*sic*) sleep, to wake with Thee'."

"That is beautiful," I said, "that is poetry. . . ."

"I have some verses here that I wrote in Gotland."

"I should like to hear them."

So I read them, such as they were—and are; standing bare-headed in the sunshine before her father-in-law's tomb:

"Ah, she is gone!—it seems the world is dead,  
 Except where Beauty lifts her lovely head,  
 And lilac and great chestnuts by old walls  
 Bedeck the sea-girt isle with coronals.

Ah, she is gone; a doom falls on my heart:  
 And sharp the pang of two souls torn apart.—  
 Gay larks sing heedlessly above square towers  
 Where Hanseatic merchants lived rich hours.

White surf breaks singing from a Viking sea  
 Whose marbled blue is Grecian symmetry,  
 And arching ruins limn mortality,—  
 But she will glance no more away from me,

For she is gone, with my fond heart bereft  
 (Will Sweden then condone a flagrant theft?)—  
 The perfect day is here, the perfect place . . .  
 O nevermore to see a late-loved face!

## LAND OF POETRY

Now she is gone it seems my heart is dead;  
Yet Beauty always lifts her lovely head;  
May Christ from His high Mercy-seat lean down  
And pluck my soul at death for Beauty's Crown."

"... Yes," she said, as we returned to the car, "I like it—but who was 'she'?"

\* \* \* \* \*

A job for life with a pension at the end is an admirable thing, but it does not normally occasion a car lift with a Rhodesian traveller from Argive Tyrins to Nauplia (where Agamemnon embarked for Troy), across the Peloponnese to Sparta, and on to brooding and lovely Olympia, the adventure ending with a voyage by caïque to the illustrious isle of Ithaca—that is, of course, to the real Ithaca, opposite Cephalonia, and not Leukas, spuriously claimed as the island of Odysseus for forty years by the late Dr. Dörpfeld, Schlieman's collaborator in the Mycenae and Troy excavations. (Leukas is flat as a pancake, and it is an added mystery how Dörpfeld could have stood his ground for forty years in face of the description Telemachus gives of Ithaca to Menelaus while on a visit to Sparta in quest of news of his long-absent father: "In Ithaca (he says) there is no room for horses to run about in, nor any meadows at all. It is a pastureland for goats and more attractive than the sort of land where horses thrive. None of the islands that slope down to the sea are rich in meadows and the kind of place where you can drive a horse. Ithaca least of all")<sup>1</sup>

Neither would the safe and pensionable appointment in Whitehall, from which I fled in early manhood to the Antipodes, have brought a surprise invitation (on my return to Stockholm from Gotland) to attend the annual gathering in Värmland of the representatives of the Swedish Tourist Traffic Association from its cultured and distinguished director, Dr. Gustaf Munthe.

In the banqueting room of the capacious Stadshotellet at Karlstad, the city where the great lyrical Värmland poet Fröding

<sup>1</sup> *The Odyssey*, Book IV, "Menelaus and Helen" (E. V. Rieu's translation), p. 79.

## VÄRMLAND

lived and worked, I sat down to dinner two evenings later with a hundred and fifty Swedish travel experts who made me feel an honoured guest among them. On the dressing table of my bedroom suite was a mass of carnations with a card attached:

*Welcom to Wermland!*

CARL-MAGNUS BRATTSTRÖM

Sekreterare i Värmlands läns Turisttrafikförening

KARLSTAD

The day following that banquet at Karlstad will always remain among the most glorious memories of my life of travel and labour.

The sun was again shining from an "Old Master" sky, as we set out in two cars and half a dozen coaches after breakfast for a tour, which was to last till the early hours of the following morning, of the lovely heart of Värmland. To the right was the arresting statue of Charles IX, the founder of the city, which dates back to the sixteenth century, and beyond it the blue waters of the Klarälven gleamed and coruscated where the waters flowed into it from the large eastern and middle valleys of Klarälvsdalen and Fryksdalen. On the other side stretched away in the kingdom of the sun this most beautiful region of central Värmland, of whose magic it is possible to find adequate description only in the rhapsodical prose of Lagerlöf or the lyrics of Fröding. Here is Squire Julius, in *Gösta Berling*, admiring the view from "Dunder Cliff":

. . . Ah, Värmland, my beautiful, my glorious Värmland! Often, when I have seen thee before me on a map, I have wondered what thou didst represent, but now I know what thou art. Thou art an old, pious hermit that sits motionless and dreams, with legs crossed and hands resting in his lap. Thou hast a pointed cap drawn over thy half-closed eyes; thou art a miser, a holy dreamer, and art very beautiful. Wide forests are thy dress. Long bands of blue waters and

chains of blue hills border it. Thou art so simple that the stranger sees not how lovely thou art. Thou art poor, as the devout desire to be. Thou sittest still, while Vänern's waves wash thy feet and thy crossed legs. To the left thou hast thy mines and thy fields of ore; there is thy beating heart. To the north thou hast the dark, lonely regions of wilderness, of mystery, and there rests thy dreaming head.

When I behold thee, majestic, serious, mine eyes fill. Thou art austere in thy beauty<sup>1</sup>; thou art meditation, poverty, resignation. Yet back of thine austerity I see the gentle features of kindness. I see and adore! If I but glance into thy deep forests, if only the hem of thy garment touches me, my spirit is healed. . . . Woe is me, woe to us all, children of Värmland! Beauty, beauty, and nothing more, we demand of life. We, the children of renunciation, of seriousness, of poverty, raise our hands in one long prayer, and ask but for this one good, beauty (p. 401).

Bull-doggedness, stoicism, and the putting up with things have become so much second nature to Englishmen that they feel almost guilty when they enjoy themselves! And I was certainly not immune from this heresy, as I settled myself comfortably in the front seat of the Chevrolet and revelled in the views of the sun-glittering highway leading to Sunne, of the endless groves of birch trees and pinewoods, the wide undulating meadows, smothered with wildflowers, and the solitary woodland paths alternating with clusters of red wooden farmsteads set like jewels amid the all-encircling green—to Sunne and the Fryken lakes and the smiling valleys of Fryksdalen, Klarälvsdalen, and Gilbergsdalen (hence our word "dale"). But I presently cast off this insidious suspicion of happiness and yielded myself in voluptuous content to the spirit of an unforgettable day, the imperishable spirit of beauty.

The first halt was at Mårbacka, the ancestral home where Selma Lagerlöf was born and which she regarded with almost religious love and devotion. "Many," she has written somewhere, "have

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ricardo León's lyrical description of Castile: "*Sagrada tierra de Castilla, grave y solemne como el mar, austera como el desierto, adusta como el semblante de los antiguos héroes.*"

seen the home of their childhood return their gaze like a wounded animal"; and it was precisely this well-nigh human appeal of the scene of her childhood and youth which aroused a resolution in early womanhood—when a fall in fortune had caused the estate to pass out of the family—that she would not cease from mental fight, nor should her pen sleep in her hand, until she had got it back again.

Certainly Mårbacka's double Doric columns, wide brooding roof, and spreading verandah, from which inspiring views are obtained of the lyrical country all around, evoke a powerful reaction from visitors; while the charming interior, with its central staircase and bright, white-panelled rooms, and the long book-lined study on the ground floor with windows at both ends, where her later masterpieces were written, are eloquent of a moral elevation of spirit, and a love of light and beauty, which can only be identified as Goethean—

They are all gone into the world of light,  
And I alone left standing here.

This love of light, this aspiration towards the highest known to our finite human apprehension, is movingly reflected in the inscription on the "hoop" sundial which stands below the main porch at Mårbacka. The inscription, with the translation, I copied out on the spot:

*Mig leder solen, Eder skuggan*  
(The sun is leading me, and you the shadow) . . .

There is something of the infinite, something forever intangible to average minds, in genius. "Reading Selma Lagerlöf," says the Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén, "is like sitting in the dusk of a Spanish Cathedral . . . afterwards one does not know whether what he has seen was a dream or reality, but certainly he has been on holy ground." And in truth that heaven-born gift for telling a story, that rhapsodical richness of inspiration and language in which Selma Lagerlöf clothes her entire literary output, induces a feeling of reverence for such a pure channel of the divine afflatus. And then, what a benevolent feudalism and patriarchalism breathes through all her books!

*Ancient Whisperings:* (Above) A sport the Vikings brought to Scotland (the contestant originally uprooted a tree).

(Below) One of the largest megalithic monuments on Gotland.







The other-worldly nourishment of this Swedish rhapsodist is as evident in the portrait of her at the age of 16 (which lies before me in the pages of an inscribed copy of Thyra Freding's "Flickan från Mårbacka", which the author thrust into my hands that day) as in the last sad photograph taken on her eightieth birthday—that solemn, almost sorrowing visage expresses the brave philosophy of the tormented and doomed Van Gogh: ". . . there is something noble, something great, which cannot be destined for the worms."

And yet, I agree with W. Gore Allen who, in his *Renaissance in the North*, writes that the first Nobel Prize-winner in Swedish Literature, for all her treasures and felicities, "has her reserves too". From the first to the last word that she ever published the reader would never divine that human beings arrived on this planet by any means so rude and crude as biological and physiological processes! And this reticence is so un-Scandinavian as to be almost startling.

Selma Lagerlöf was fortunate in the pictorial representation of the *Gösta Berling* characters, for they have all been delineated with extraordinary artistic insight by Einar Nerman, whose pastel portrait of the hero, of the unforgettable unfrocked cavalier-pastor, is a masterpiece of creative imagination. . . .

CHAPTER IX  
LAND OF POETRY, LEGEND AND  
ROMANCE—II

*"They danced as with bodies of tow set afire,  
All jumping like grasshoppers higher and higher,  
. . . With doodely, doodely, day!"*

OUR NEXT STOPPING PLACE was the lyrical town of Sunne, "Broby Market", which, by the way, has one of the largest and finest churches in Värmland whose white tower and soaring spire is a landmark for miles around. Here we took lunch in an old family hotel built in the colonial style favoured also in the residential districts of New Zealand (I am thinking of Parnell Avenue, Auckland, where I used to stay). The hotel actually figures in *Gösta Berling* as "Broby Gästgivaregård".

Shall I ever forget that sun-filled hour! with the Middle Fryken lake glittering in the sun through the swaying branches of the silver birches beyond a fold of green, flower-decked meadow; with the wooden steps of the hotel leading down on the other side to a dusty country road flanked with flowering rose-bushes; and with the white-panelled dining-room alive with chatter, its long central table literally loaded with the most delicious foods, including the ever-liberal *smörgasbord*, and fresh salmon caught that day in the lake, and wines, wines, yes fine-flavoured Sauternes and Hocks from La Douce France.

It was during this repast that a baron and his high-born lady invited me to stay with them in Östergötland. "I shall be happy to show you all the places of historic and artistic interest within motoring distance of our home in Linköping," he promised. He bore a name celebrated in Swedish history. So one day I shall go to Linköping, the capital of one of Sweden's most ancient kingdoms—and that is saying something!—and meet some of its thirty thousand inhabitants, whom I am sure I shall like and admire; Linköping, where the holy remains of St. Bridget were

welcomed back to Sweden on July 23, 1373, after the Saint's residence of twenty-three years in Rome, where she was the instrument of bringing back the Popes from exile in Avignon.<sup>1</sup>

From Sunne we went on to Gräsmark, a "picture-village", an extraordinary place, set on the very shores of Rottnen lake, with a vast backcloth of hillside forested with dark pines, and peopled by descendants of Finns who migrated here in the seventeenth century. We began to pass deserted-looking farms and homesteads a few miles (English miles; for the Swedish "mile" equals six of them) beyond Sunne. And very lonely they looked, situated in the midst of the flat, green landscapes, so that it was not difficult to comprehend how the *genus loci* had worked on the brooding imaginations and native superstitions of the Finnish migrants, giving rise to all kinds of barbaric practices, such as the mummifying and worship of the dead after the fashion of the Ancient Egyptians.

"They used to 'pickle' dead members of the family and keep the mummies up in the hayloft," remarked someone in the car behind me; "and if anyone came to take the bodies away for burial they just burned the whole place down."

Such dark practices were, I was sure, far removed from the thoughts of a Värmland boy we came upon, peacefully fishing in the Upper Fryken, from a lonely and lovely stretch of road. The car slowed down and we hailed the young fisherman, who rose from the lakeside and brought across for us to admire a large and splendid fish, newly caught. The lad was tall and slim, with delicate hands and Grecian features—a veritable young Apollo (as I said in a previous chapter), and I am even ready to believe that the "Farshooter with unshorn hair . . . the Lord of Song" was also freckled, though he does not appear to be so in his superb pediment statue in the museum at Olympia which Dörpfeld told me he thought was actually intended to represent the young Zeus.

From Gräsmark we motored on to Charlottenberg, and then to Eda Skans.

<sup>1</sup> "Men and women, rich and poor, clergy and laity, flocked to welcome them, and when they came to Linköping all the bells were ringing. . . ." *Life of St. Bridget*, by F. J. M. A. Partridge (Burns, Oates), p. 283.

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At Eda Skans, near where there is a radioactive mineral spa lying amid ridges covered with firs and pines, we stopped by a large memorial stone erected to the memory of "Karl Johan", the towering Marshal Bernadotte whom destiny so strangely marked out to found a dynasty, which still flourishes after a century and a half, while it banished the erstwhile Master of Europe into far exile to die, predeceased by the son and heir in whom all his hopes of a continuance of his line had been placed, the young Duke of Reichstadt, whose simple tomb in the crypt of the Maria Theresa Church in Vienna is fit memorial for an elegy. Beyond the memorial at Eda Skans was an earthwork (discovered during the 1939-45 war, when this frontier was closely guarded by a modern Swedish army) of a frontier fortress thrown up by Charles XII, and still eloquent of his iron resolution and enigmatic personality. Bright yellow broom was in flower on the low walls of earth; and I plucked a sprig of it and presented it to our driver and hostess.

Besides the capital, Karlstad, Värmland boasts three other fair-sized towns—Kristinehamn, an important deep-sea port on Vänern and lively trading centre of some twenty thousand inhabitants, where iron ore is exported to the United Kingdom; and in the north, like the two points of an inverted triangle, there is Filipstad, on Lake Daglösen, a centre of the mining district of Bergslagen, idyllically situated amid cultivated country and surrounded by woods and moorlands, where the great inventor John Ericsson, one of the two famous Värmland inventor brothers, is buried under a huge and somewhat vulgar granite monument, surmounted by a globe and bronze eagle, in what has been described as the most beautiful churchyard in the world; and Arvika, set on the Glafs fjorden lake and backed by the arcadian Jösse country.

Never shall I forget the evening we arrived at Arvika, the chief town of West Värmland, renowned centre for arts and crafts and the haunt of poets, artists, bards, musicians, and those unique conversationalists of the Jösse county (famed in all Sweden for the liveliness and intelligence of the inhabitants) whose business it is,

as it was that of the professional joker in Ancient Greece and the "fool" of the Courts of the Middle Ages, to put everyone in merry mood after a banquet with their quips and jolly stories.

Ten hours had passed since we had left Karlstad, and we had covered well over a hundred miles, including a forty-mile run through a virgin forest which, in its primeval density, was eerily evocative of the dawn ages of the earth. We had passed through some of the most beautiful and celebrated terrain in the province, and when we rolled into the town the northern sun, still shining down in full glory, caressed our faces as we stepped from the cars and coaches to be met by the high worthies of Arvika. With one of them (it may well have been the Mayor himself) I started a discussion on the importance of preserving the beautiful Swedish regional costumes, "like flower plots alive" as Karlfeldt so vividly describes them, which Dr. Munthe, the learned Director of the Tourist Traffic Association (who was for twenty years Director of the Rhöss Arts and Crafts Museum in Gothenburg), informed me were introduced into Sweden from Spain in the time of Philip II; and the enchanting and curious Swedish country dances.

"What a pity," said this excellent man of Arvika, "that you will not be here for the Midsummer festival, for then you would see our famous *Jössebäradspolska* danced." He said no more, and I went for a walk to the top of the broad street to admire the distinctive architecture of a splendid new church designed by Tengbom, one of Sweden's leading modern architects who also designed the Stockholm Concert House; and when I returned somebody else was describing the artists' and writers' colony on the shores of the lake a few miles outside the town, and the internationally famous folk-music high school at Ingersund, the only one of its kind in the world.

In Sweden a *snaps* before lunch or dinner raises one above all mundane preoccupations, and when it is followed, as it was at the town banquet at Arvika to which we now sat down, by three different wines served with courses which would have done credit to the best Paris restaurants, a poor devil of a writer from England inured perforce to his Nessus shirt of hardship and

# VÄRMLAND

economic drudgery is inclined to ask, varying the Old Testament cry—O Life, where is thy sting? O world, thy victory!

The evening was further memorable because it was on this occasion that I first heard the hauntingly sweet strains of *Värmlandsvisan*, "The Song of Värmland", half ballad and half hymn, more movingly lovely even than the *Londonderry Air*. I have read that this folk-hymn, sung in America by Jenny Lind (who is buried in Westminster Abbey, by the way) moved vast audiences to tears. Certainly, if ever a tune has captured the emotion of pure joy in natural beauty it is the *Värmlandsvisan*:

Andantino

1. Ack Vär-me-land, du skö-na, du här-li-ga land, du kro-na för  
Ja, om jag kom-me mitt i det för-lo-va-de land, till Värm-land jag

PIANO

Sve-a-ri-kes lan-der! Ja, där vill jag le-va, ja, där vill jag dö; om  
än-dä ä-ter-vän-der!

engång i-från Värmland jag tager mig en mö, så vet jag, att aldrig jag mig äng-rar.

("O Värmland you lovely, you glorious land,  
The far-flung realms of Svea proudly crowning.  
Ah, stood I in the midst of the happy Promised Land,  
To Värmland my steps would still be turning.  
In Värmland will I die, and in Värmland live my life;  
If ever out of Värmland I choose myself a wife  
I know I shall never mourn my choosing!")

Just as we all stood up to sing it with a will a card was passed across to me with the message: "Will be putting on the dancing for you at 11 o'clock." The message had obviously come from the Mayor (as I prefer to think of him), to whom I had revealed my love of the Swedish folk-dances; and as the last notes of that exquisite Värmland hymn died away the tables were whisked off, and chairs ranged round the large room, after which teams of dancers with their fiddlers, all brilliantly dressed in their regional costumes, entered and took up places for the Värmland *Jössebäradspolska* in which the boys, in yellow breeches, red stockings and velvet waistcoats turn cartwheels, somersault, and try to touch the roof beams with their feet. And in a moment this delightful and highly interesting measure, which Fröding so inimitably describes in one of his poems in *Accordion and Guitar*, was in full swing:

They danced as with bodies of tow set afire,  
All jumping like grasshoppers higher and higher,  
And heel it rang sharp upon stone.  
The coat-tails they fluttered, the aprons they flew,  
And braids were a-flapping and skirts flung askew,  
While the music would whimper and drone. . . .

The Chevrolet had gone on ahead with two members of the party who had to catch the Stockholm night express at Karlstad, and I returned with Dr. Munthe and his charming lady through deep and sombre pine forests, past flower-decked meadows and lakes aetherialised by the marvellous translucent Tennysonian light of the northern moon.

That day the beauty of Värmland entered my soul.



CHAPTER X  
KARLSTAD NOTES

*All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,  
All are but ministers of love,  
And feed his sacred flame.*

COLERIDGE

June, 1947.

I WAS WRITING IN MY ROOM in the Stadshotellet at Karlstad this evening, when first the outer door and then the inner one opened, and a beautiful girl entered. She could not have been more than seventeen; she was slender as a willow, with wide, darkish-grey eyes from which she regarded me like a young doe surprised in the woods. I leaned back in enchantment from my typewriter and said something, I know not what, in English. She moved a step backwards from where she was standing motionless in the middle of the carpet and made a remark in Swedish which I did not understand, letting her eyes roam round the small room, over the dishevelled bed where I had enjoyed an afternoon siesta, the table with my papers and books; and the reproduction of a Zorn etching on the wall. Then more musical Swedish words came from her lips as she leaned against the wall by the inner door.

Where had she come from? What did she want? I stood up and walked gently towards her, like a collector stalking an Emperor butterfly, observing all the time the charming little white hat she was wearing, and her straight and shapely legs encased in dark transparent stockings, and her milk-white arms and throat. (Stay with me awhile, I thought—don't go, my dear! This is a moment for which I have longed. I feel suddenly springing in my heart pure affection; I could fall down and adore your youth and beauty, your fresh femininity. Perhaps you can reveal the secret of life and the meaning of death, if I learn your lovely language; already I feel that that dear look from your

eyes is healing my poor soul, seared and burned by Europe's anguish. I am conscious in your sweet presence of no intoxication of the blood, and the restless delight and fascinating horror of desire are utterly absent. Maybe you are in fact an angel from heaven, an airy spirit that has taken the form of a Värmland maiden, to bring hope to mortals. Stay with me! I want to smother your hands, your cheeks, your innocent lips with kisses.)

Even so did the thoughts flame in my mind, as I pondered how to keep my unexpected visitor, what to say, what to do. Still she stood there, graceful as Pallas Athene, leaning not on a spear but against the white wall, looking with her wide and candid eyes from my table to the telephone on the window-sill and back again. I made one step towards the instrument, asking in the English she did not understand if I should ring, if I should call the reception desk for anything. "*Nej, nej!*" she exclaimed quietly, giving me a young smile; then glanced round the room once more and gazed steadily at me. A moment later she had glided away and was gone, leaving me floundering in the rarer air such beings breathe. (As once before, while standing in the vestibule of the New Theatre waiting to book for "*Peer Gynt*", I was approached by an unknown young woman who spoke of the ballet and all the new plays she was seeing as if she had known me all her life! "It's such fun," she said, with a radiant smile.

"Will you come out to tea?" I had ventured, feeling a little like the late Tommy Handley in "*Itma*".

"Not to-day; but I will give you my card." And she groped in her handbag. When I produced my own card from sheer nervousness she dropped it in the bag with a smile and vanished; and I have never heard of or seen her again, and remember only her name: "*Barbara Ogilvie*".)

\* \* \* \* \*

Nothing, so far as I am aware, is known either in England or the United States of America, of Carl Jacob Hueblin, who was born in Karlstad in 1763 and died there in the year 1808. Yet he constructed a flying machine in which he flew high over the Klarälven river a hundred and fifty years before Orville Wright

soared into the air at Dayton, Ohio, in the big kite once on exhibition in the Science Museum at South Kensington; and he built a steam-propelled car which he drove all the way from Karlstad to Stockholm, where the King, Gustaf III, thereupon insisted on buying it from him.

Hueblin, model of the old cavalier Kevenhüller in *Gösta Berling's Saga*, was, in fact, an amazing genius, born in a province famed throughout Sweden for the "fantasy", artistic nature, and inventiveness of its sons. He is described as a *könstmästare*, a "master of art", an inventor and engineer, and he was above all a character. His adventures started when he encountered in the main square of Karlstad the *Lambersfru*, a very fair and beautiful girl from the woods with dangerous green eyes, wearing a live snake round her neck and dangling behind her a tail like that of a fox. Scientists in those days had not heard of reverted atavism, or encountered (as they have in these) beautiful young women with the backs of hairy gorillas; or the *Lambersfru* might not have been insulted, lampooned and made fun of by all the rude boys of Karlstad whenever she came to town.

One day Hueblin, a tall and gracious figure in the high hat, frock coat and long whiskers with goatee beard fashionable at the time, arrived at the main square just as she was crossing it followed by a rabble of jeering *gös*, whom he thereupon rebuked as he swept off his hat and, bowing low, asked if he could be of any service to a lady.

In gratitude for the only kind act she had ever experienced, the *Lambersfru* said she would confer on Hueblin the power to do fine and remarkable things; but he would only be able to do them once and could never repeat a creation or invention; so it was no wonder that he made such a display of resistance in Stockholm when King Gustaf III insisted on buying from him his fine home-made steam car.

In 1790 Hueblin built the old Västerbron, which for a hundred and forty-nine years spanned the broad Klarälven, until 1939 in fact, when it was replaced by the handsome and graceful structure which faces the palatial Stadshotellet where I am writing at the present moment. His flying-machine, like the one invented by

Leonardo da Vinci—which, however, never got beyond the blueprint stage—had large wings in which he placed his arms, and thus prepared he took off from a high windmill, also his own invention and construction, on the left bank of the river, and flew over to the right bank and beyond.

Hueblin was also responsible for the timely measures by which the great fire which destroyed the Cavaliers' Wing at Ekeby (Rottneros Manor), as described in the *Saga*, was got under control, by galloping water supplies in improvised barrel-carts ("Hueblin's fire-engines") from the Lower Fryken lake.

And to think that the world knows nothing at all about this extraordinary man! . . .

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

A Welshman, one Llewellyn Lloyd, lived in a hut beside the Fryken lakes in Värmland for thirty years in the middle of last century. Like Nimrod, he was a great hunter, and chased bears all over the province, quite at home alone in the vast and (at that time) terrifyingly lonely forests. From photographs of him preserved in the Karlstad Museum (where there are many interesting Fröding relics, including some of the poet's letters and books and a picture of him sitting up on his deathbed with staring eyes and leonine head, looking like a Swedish Lear) it would appear that Llewellyn Lloyd was an uncommonly tall man, and sported the then fashionable mutton-chop whiskers. A hunting case of his, with twin compartments, one for sandwiches and the other for whisky, is in the possession of my cultured and genial host, who is also French Consul here and whose immense Stadshotellet with its great restaurants and 150 bedrooms, is about the most sumptuous and well-run hotel I have ever had the luck to be a guest in.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Announcements of betrothals appear in the Stockholm papers under the title "FÖRLOVADE"—Charming to a married ear.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

## VÄRMLAND

On Sundays hundreds of bicycles are parked outside Karlstad railway station, without a watchman, and without so much as a padlock between the lot of them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gusts of happy, heedless, uncontrollable feminine laughter from members of the staff in the sunny courtyard below rose to my second-floor room early this morning. How I love to hear it!—the “divine madness” of Chesterton’s “Everlasting Man”!

\* \* \* \* \*

Who says the Swedes are wholly material and luxury-loving, and not spiritually minded at all! Members of the Swedish colony in London have remarked so to me, and advanced this argument as sufficient reason why they could never return to Sweden to live.

For two hours, this Sunday morning, I sat in the *Domkyrka*, the fine modern Cathedral of Karlstad, and during the whole time the attitude of a fairly large congregation was one of rapt quietness, and even little children were no trouble at all and only squeaked at rare intervals. The service was moving and dignified; the people sang their tuneful hymns all together, seated. At the conclusion, after a long sermon by the “prästen”, communicants proceeded silently in three big groups for half an hour to the altar rails, where the senior minister, who was young and tall with a fine musical voice, laid a hand for some moments on the head of each communicant as he administered the Bread and Wine.

As once before, in Palma Cathedral in Majorca, strong emotion surged up within me at the beauty of the scene, and burning tears obscured my sight.

Though earth and man were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be,  
And Thou wert left alone,  
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,  
Nor atom that his might could render void:  
Thou, Thou art being and breath,  
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.<sup>1</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> Emily Brontë.

## KARLSTAD NOTES

In the roadside as we came out stood a brand new Buick "Roadmaster" touring car, with a "California" number-plate, and some late worshippers got in and drove away.

\* \* \* \* \*

A mite not more than three years old, with hair like yellow silk, fell down on his little bottom beside his mother who was sending off letters at a counter in the *Postkontoret*. He then rolled over the floor and caught his head a big whack on the iron post of an arm-rest. I shot involuntarily forward to pick him up, waiting for the excruciating howls that would certainly have followed on the other side of the North Sea. But he just sat up wonderingly, patted his head for a moment, and then trotted back to his mama still without a sound, and now with a proud smile. The Viking breed!

\* \* \* \* \*

"Tedder" and "Churchill" sports jackets, and "Churchill" (siren) suits are on display in the windows of men's clothing shops here, and "Monty" summer suits!

\* \* \* \* \*

In a suburb of Karlstad a University student, wearing his white peaked cap, was serving in shirtsleeves in a small butcher's shop not far from the Klara bridge.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the hotel we drove out in the Chevrolet this morning in bright sunshine for a visit to Filipstad where that famous son of Värmland, John Ericsson, is buried. Soon after leaving the spacious and wooded outskirts of Värmland's capital we halted for a few moments beside the Frödingstein, an enormous boulder with carved grotesques and quotations commemorating the fact that in this idyllic spot the great lyrical poet of Värmland was inspired by the sight of bare-footed children playing in dappled sunshine by a stream to write one of his loveliest lyrics. On the other side of the calm Klarälvsdalen stood the white-fronted house where Fröding lived for many years with his sisters; and

later in the day we were to pass through the village of Alster where he was born, a pretty hamlet on a hill set in deep woodlands, with a church (with an "onion dome") built by Russian prisoners during the reign of Charles XII. . . .

Filipstad, a pretty town of some five thousand inhabitants, is charmingly situated on the shores of the small Daglösen lake. The imposing church, built after designs by Tessin, has a great soaring exterior of pure white. The interior was bare enough but beautifully light from the long plain windows (for there is no stained glass in Swedish churches—perhaps it was all smashed at the time of the Reformation as "popish superstition"), and shoots of young silver birches had been grouped round the altar and down the aisles, bringing the very breath of the countryside into the temple.

The Ericsson mausoleum, a somewhat grandiose monument surmounted by a huge bronze eagle, stands on the crest of the cemetery across the water, a churchyard described by an American journalist, somewhat sweepingly, as "the most beautiful in the world". Beautiful it certainly is, and beautifully situated, within its coronet of trees above the shining lake. Yet we visited a more beautiful one this day, when, after a call at Mårbacka our kind hostess—who had presided over the kitchen, with its shining copper pans and saucepans, on the day of Selma Lagerlöf's funeral, when an immense concourse of mourners filled her ancestral home—drove us up to the churchyard of East Ämtervik where the great Värmland novelist sleeps in the family tomb under a granite slab simply bearing her name. There, in that shaded "God's acre" overlooking a superb sheet of rainbow-hued lake water fringed with poplars, I savoured a deep spiritual peace that remained with me long after we had arrived back in Karlstad. . . .

From Ämtervik we followed a road winding through forests and by the shores of lakes, and past disused mine-workings, to Langbanshyttan, a mining hamlet lying about half-way between Filipstad and Karlstad. Here John Ericsson was born on July 31, 1803, in a rambling red-ochred creeper-covered homestead, whose

many outbuildings look like the boxes of a racing stable. The present proprietor, the manager of the mine, led us into the natal room himself, now ranged with spotless white beds for guests, and then to the modern living quarters where he introduced us to his wife, an Amazonian type, a Swedish Diana, who hunted elk in the neighbouring forests. The handsome head and antlers of a giant bull which she had brought down at a few yards' pace the previous autumn adorned the wall of the delightful sitting-room where we were regaled with light refreshments.

We walked along a road where lilies-of-the-valley grew wild in the hedgerows to a small cottage near a desolate mine-working. Here the young Ericsson had passed his tenderest years amid a world of mine dumps, smelting houses and engineering constructions which must have powerfully influenced his young mind and started him off on the path that led to the "Monitor", the United States, world fame—and a vulgar tomb at Filipstad.



# BOHUSLÄN

## CHAPTER XI

### ON THE NORWEGIAN FRONTIER

*His fall was destin'd to a barren strand,  
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;  
He left a name at which the world grew pale,  
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.*

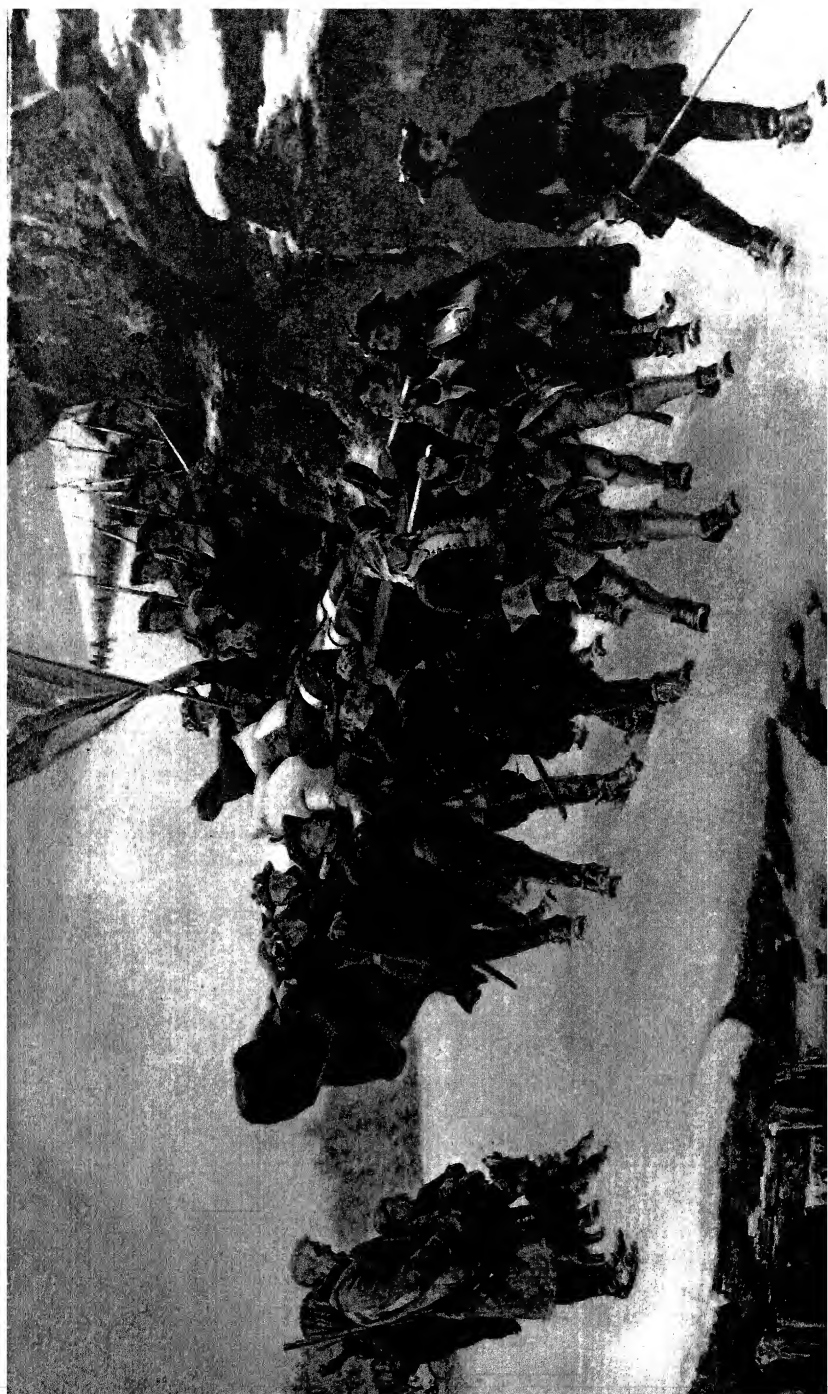
FROM VÄRMLAND I RETURNED for a time to Dalsland in order to visit Ed, lying on the southern shore of the expansive and beautiful Lake Stora Lee ("Great Lee Lake"), and six hours' steaming by Dalsland Canal boats from Lennartsfors.

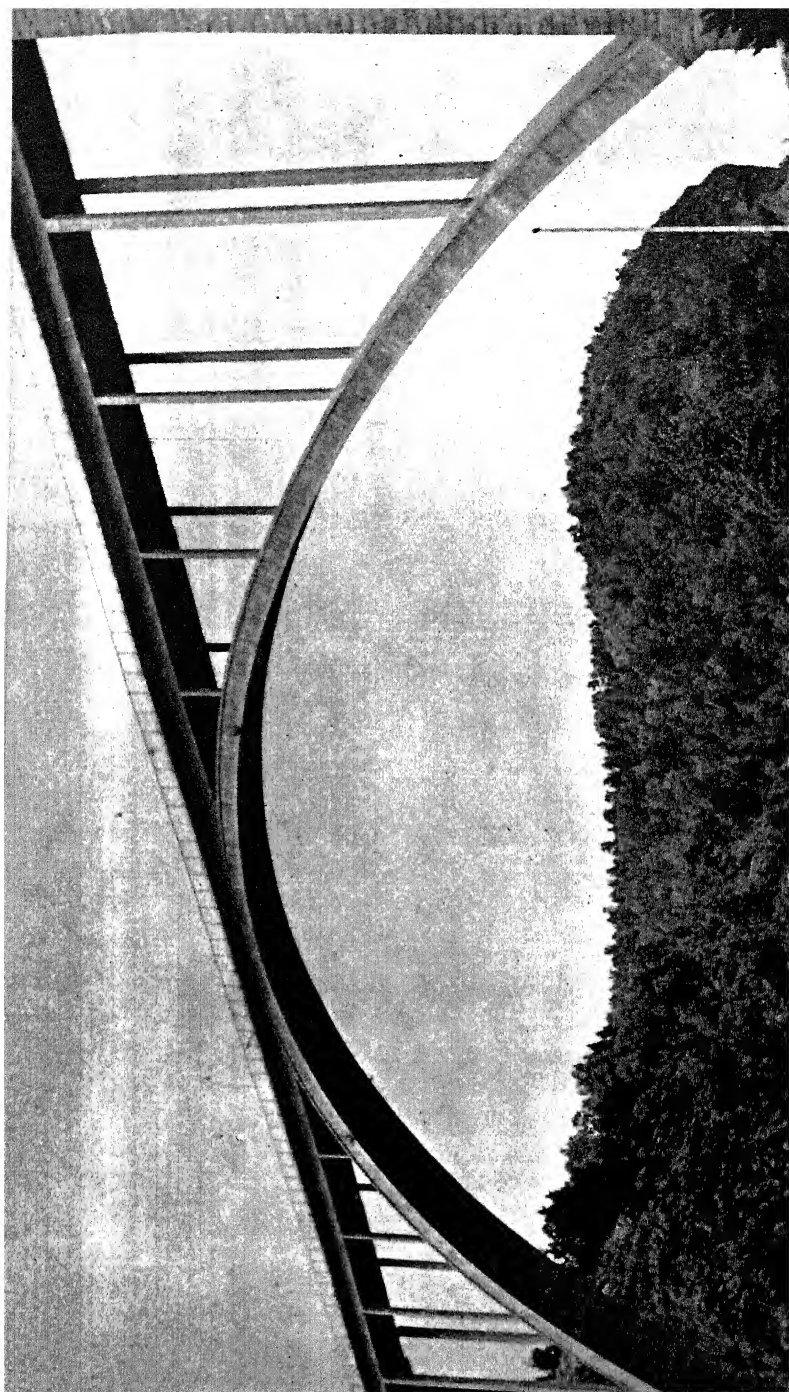
When I emerged one late afternoon from the railway station Ed seemed completely deserted, although I learned later that it is a very popular summer and winter resort with abundant facilities for ski-ing, bathing, boating and fishing, and with good walks through aromatic pinewoods and along the coasts of Stora Lee and the smaller Lake Lilla Lee which adjoins it. The one street in Ed, with its few wooden bungalows and stores and its two tourist hotels, bisects the strip of land which divides the two lakes. Outside the station was a plain stone monument raised in 1864, to the memory of Colonel Nils Ericsson (brother of John), the constructor of the canal.

I soon found my way to the Turisthotell, where I was most hospitably entertained by the manageress, a Norwegian lady who had also been at the Tourist Association gathering in Värmland. She was very anxious to visit Madeira with her mother, the proprietor of the hotel, and I did not discourage her but told her of the good wine of the island to be savoured in the bodega which occupies the reputed house where Christopher Columbus lived, when he was stationed on the island in the service of King John II of Portugal.

In a photographer's window in Ed high street was an enlivening

*Death of a Hero:* Soldiers accompanying the body of Charles XII across the frontier, after his death in battle in Norway in 1718—from C. Cederström's celebrated painting.





portrait of an attractive young inhabitant whose Nordic beauty I praised as I sat with my hostess in the enclosed terrace of the hotel, admiring the track of beaten copper and gold shed across the greater lake by the late setting sun. "I will tell her what you say," she said with a smile, "she will be pleased."

Presently we strolled down to the station to ascertain the time the post-bus left next morning for Strömstad, for there is no extension of the private inland line from Ed to the coast. A tall and distinguished-looking man in a green uniform with yellow facings bowed from the waist politely as he greeted our approach, and gave the information with the graciousness of a king. And once again I experienced that inward glow and harmony which expression of the people's innate courtesy always arouses in me in Sweden, where young girls still curtsy deeply to their elders as they only do in England to royalty, and the lads who carry luggage to or from the inland steamers—as on Vänern—sometimes bow so low when they are tipped or thanked that their flaxen hair touches the ground, and where flags are flown at half-mast on the death of even the humblest villager. If courtesy is the natural expression of an inward grace and graciousness, then the loss of these qualities of spirit in the English character is nothing less than a national misfortune.

Later in the luminous evening I ventured out alone to admire the exquisite colouring on lake and wood, and presently stood for some time regarding with profound interest a low timbered one-storey building painted in the inevitable red ochre from Falun's copper mines, for it was none other than the historic *stuga* where the body of Charles XII had rested after being carried by devoted pall-bearers all the way from the fatal trench at Frederikshald, where he had fallen in 1718. In the National Museum at Stockholm, where the greatest art collection in Sweden is nobly housed and to which I resort whenever I find myself in the Swedish capital to enjoy the Zorns and the Carl Larssons and to admire the delicate statuary groups of Sergel, Sweden's greatest sculptor, and the enchanting portraits of eighteenth-century powdered and bewigged beauties by Roslin, who is little enough known, even among connoisseurs, in other European capitals—there is a

famous and dramatic full-length canvas depicting this mournful march (it hangs in the same gallery as "The Sack of Visby" by Hellquist); while across the way, in a glass case in the Nordiska Museum on Djurgården, is the characteristic uniform, mud-bespattered and bloodstained, and the black thigh-boots which the young king was wearing when he met his death, as also the blood-stained, lace-edged shirt taken from the body of the all-conquering Gustavus Adolphus, the last king to die fighting, who also fell in the very midst of battle on the fateful plains of Lützen.<sup>1</sup>

Death lays his icy hand on kings,  
Sceptre and Crown  
Must tumble down,  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade. . . .

In the magical northern twilight I imagined that I saw the ghostly procession bear slowly down the one street of Ed to lay the royal dust down for a space in the *chapel ardiente* of this humble wooden *stuga*, which is now a museum, before its translation for permanent sepulture in the Riddarholm Church in Old Stockholm, where the remains are exhumed from time to time to decide the perennial historical problem of whether the king was shot from the front or the back. And the recollection came arrestingly to mind again of David von Krafft's full-length portrait in the great Gripsholm Castle collection—that consummate psychological study of one of the most astonishing monarchs since Alexander the Great, whose very appearance, as Carlyle wrote, "among the luxurious kings and knights of the North was like the bursting of a cataract of bombshells in a dull ballroom". "He thinks of history," says a character in von Heidenstam's great historical novel, *The Charles Men*, "as a man in love does of

<sup>1</sup> A friendly young Swede from Malmö, on a first visit to England, with whom I shared a table in a London restaurant at the time this chapter was being written, assured me that Gustavus Adolphus is now the most popular among the younger generation in Sweden of the two great warrior-kings. "Charles XII was a very shy man," he told me. I think he meant that he was an enigma.

his sweetheart." And history has rewarded him with fame which can never die while men's hearts respond to the superb exploits, in defeat as in overwhelming victory, of a true king and a true hero.

So far as is known, the tender passion of love never warmed the heart of this extraordinary man, except of brotherly love for his sisters. He impoverished his country and brought it near ruin, with the loss of the entire Swedish Empire, and he contributed nothing to the sum total of human progress other than the inspiration of his heroic spirit and the invulnerable dignity of his bearing. But in Sweden his soul, like the vision of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza on the roads of Spain, "still goes marching on":

The garlands wither on your brow;  
Then boast no more your mighty deeds,  
Upon Death's purple altar now  
See where the victor-victim bleeds.  
Your heads must come  
To the cold tomb:  
Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.<sup>1</sup>

On the road between Duved and Tännforsen, in Jämtland, not far from one of the most beautiful waterfalls in Europe, stands a melancholy monument to two thousand Swedish soldiers who froze to death after getting lost in the snow during their retreat from Norway, after the temporary lying-in-state of their late king and captain in this tiny hut at Ed. Maybe his true memorial then, like that of the Turkish conqueror of the island of Djerba from the Spaniards, is a pyramid of skulls. . . .

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

It was raining when the early post-bus left for Strömstad next morning, but the storm-wracked sky cleared somewhat as we neared the seaport, which lies on the banks of a small river in the extreme north of Bohuslän and boasts the distinction of being the oldest bathing resort on the entire west coast of Sweden. In

<sup>1</sup> James Shirley.

fact, one of the two bathing machines specially constructed for the "Strömstad Bathing Establishment" in 1843—about the time George IV entered the sea at Brighthelmstone while a string band on the beach struck up encouraging marches—by John Ericsson himself is still on exhibition in the town, and probably both were still in daily use when the little crippled girl who was later to become world-famous as Selma Lagerlöf was taken to Strömstad for the cure by her anxious family, and miraculously recovered in a moment the full use of her limbs on being taken by the cabin-boy of the brig *Jacob* to see a Bird of Paradise brought back by the captain from a voyage to West Africa.<sup>1</sup>

From a cove near the town in July, 1718, Charles XII launched against the Norwegians the war galleys he had had specially constructed and dragged twelve miles overland from Idefjord under the supervision of that prodigy of nature, Emanuel Svedberg, or Swedenborg, who had as great—or almost as great—inventive genius as Leonardo da Vinci and an even vaster intellectual capacity, with the heaven-born visions of a Swedish Blake. What a man! In the windows of the Swedenborg Society in Bloomsbury are two great facsimile folio-manuscripts in which Swedenborg has not so much written as poured his ideas in a cataract of script and drawings of amazing neatness and legibility. Even the ink is scarcely at all faded in two centuries.

Scarcely had he gone a short way beyond Strömstad, when he caught sight of great galleys on the dry ground. He himself was yoked to the bow with peasants and horses and oxen to drag the vessels two and a half miles farther over the promontory to Idefjord. Inch by inch the ship was pulled over corduroy roads and heaps of twigs; by night in the light of pine torches, and by day in the heat of the July sun. A little man in a coat of lilac satin and a bushy wig, with broad gold buckles on his shoes, went back and forth among the men to encourage them. It was Emanuel Swedenborg, for Polhem had commissioned him to execute this unusual task.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Mårbaka*, "The Strömstad Journey".

<sup>2</sup> *The Charles Men* ("Frederikshall") Verner von Heidenstam; Jonathan Cape, p. 482.

I was not in Strömstad on holiday, however, nor for historical research, but for the purpose of reporting for *The Times*, whose special correspondent in Sweden I was on the occasion of this visit, a description of the opening by King Haakon of Norway and the Crown Prince of Sweden of the Svinesundsbron, the highest bridge in Europe.

On alighting from the bus, I took from my pocket and read once more the note I had found that morning lying beside my breakfast "lay-out" at Ed. It said:

*Mr. Coles*

*Dear Sir,*

*I will only tell You that You,v gott a single rum in Grand Hotell Strömstad, and the porter saidhe will help You with the car. I realy forgott to ask for the buss.*

*Hoping You will amuse the other days in Sweden.*

*Very hard to write English.*

*Greeting  
Berethe Klöver.*

It was after ten o'clock and obvious therefore that there was now no time to seek such a "rum", if the scene of the opening ceremony was to be reached on time; for I was not yet in possession of the necessary Press authorisation, and nobody was aware of my coming. I accordingly hastened to the Restaurant Skagerack, on the front, where I was so fortunate as to encounter at once an English-speaking reporter from the great Gothenburg newspaper, *Göteborgs' Handelstidningen*, who handed me a spare Press ticket made out in the name of one "Herr Åke Hall" and turned me round and sent me off again with a charabanc party just moving away to witness the arrival by train of the Swedish royal party.

We reached the station just in time to see the Crown Prince and Crown Princess inspecting the Sea Scout guard of honour drawn up on the platform, and Her Royal Highness—with whom I had enjoyed a ten-minutes' conversation at a reception in the Royal Palace at Stockholm only a few days before—accepting with a gentle smile the bouquet handed to her with an enormous curtsy by the daughter of the Mayor of Strömstad.



Thirty minutes later I stood with the official party on board the coastal steamer *Göteborg*, which was taking the royal pair up the broad Svinesund in the teeth of a strong head-wind, and under a spattering of icy raindrops. I entered a small ship's lounge for shelter and was immediately confronted by two local beauties wearing the pretty Bohuslän regional costumes, comprising lace cap, blue bodice decked out with lace, and long billowy blue satin skirt with white apron, who proffered boxes in which to drop coins for some Strömstad charity. When they had collected my offering, I got them describing their dresses and regional dances. They were pleased enough at the opportunity to practise their English (one, the taller of the two with apple cheeks and an "apple" smile, was studying English Literature, she said, at Gothenburg University).

On the Svinesundsbron itself, which soared a hundred and fifty-five metres above the white-capped waters of the Sound, I broke through the tape held by two Swedish policemen and advanced with a covey of Scandinavian journalists to a canopy in the centre where King Haakon and the Swedish Crown Prince were receiving the engineers and other officials responsible for the completion of the bridge. Speeches, long speeches, followed, and then we all trooped across to the other bank, where the Norwegian sightseers kept up a heartening wail of welcome for their popular king until he was again on Swedish soil, and everybody was moving off in charabancs for the *Middag*, the banquet awaiting us in the Restaurant Skagerack.

I, the only non-Scandinavian journalist present, was placed with a Swedish naval lieutenant and Hr. Gustaf Boje, of the AB Filmindustri, Stockholm, who described several expeditions through Sweden he had made with Prince William. Full justice was done by all to that banquet, for the gusty weather and the long wait at the bridge had developed Viking-like appetites; and not the least enjoyable feature of the proceedings was the stirring music dispensed from a gallery at the end of the hall.

Here is the *Matsedel* (Menu) and the *Musikprogram*, side by side:

# ON THE NORWEGIAN FRONTIER

## MATSEDEL

## MUSIKPROGRAM

		<i>Dirigent:</i>	
<i>Delikatesssandwiches</i>		<i>Musikdirektör Marc S. Z. de la Berg</i>	
<i>Nystekt kyckling</i>			
<i>Sallad</i>	Svenskt festspel . . . . .	<i>A. Söderman</i>	
	I sommarnatt, vals . . . . .	<i>K. Söderman</i>	
<i>Bombe Carl Gustaf</i>	Morgonstämning och Anitras dans		
<i>Friandises</i>	ur Per Gynt suite nr I . . . . .	<i>E. Grieg</i>	
	Svenska folkvisor och danser . . . . .	<i>J. van Eysden</i>	
	Till rosorna . . . . .	<i>W. Petterson-Berger</i>	
	An den Frühling . . . . .	<i>E. Grieg</i>	
	Periette dansar, valsintermezzo . . . . .	<i>G. Grafström</i>	
<i>Estremadura</i>	När rönnen blommar . . . . .	<i>W. Petterson-Berger</i>	
<i>Madeira Fine</i>	Bröllopsdag på Trolldhaugen . . . . .	<i>E. Grieg</i>	
<i>Cognac Original-Kaffe</i>	Bojarernas intägsmarsch . . . . .	<i>J. Halvorsen</i>	

That "Bombe Carl Gustaf" was something to remember, for while we were disposing of it and sipping our *Madeira Fine* five waiters slowly descended the staircase leading from the musicians' gallery bearing high, each with tray on bent right arm, trays on which miniature glaciers formed the letters of the word "Norway" in Swedish, thus:

N

O

R

G

E

My story duly secured, an exclusive one as it proved, the next preoccupation was to file it without delay in Printing House Square. And so I hurried away to the Grand Hotel, where my colleague of the Gothenburg paper allowed me the use of his room and typewriter to prepare my cable, which, however, the official

at the Cable office would not accept for transmission without presentation of *The Times'* Press pass, then in possession of the regular Swedish correspondent in Stockholm. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to telephone the full message through to his home, where I was fortunate enough to find him in. "Splendid," he said, "you've got a scoop; you were in the right place to-day. Wait while I get a pencil." The next morning my story duly appeared on the middle page of *The Times*, where it was read with interest, to my knowledge, by former colleagues in Madrid:

## HIGHEST BRIDGE IN EUROPE

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### KING HAAKON AT OPENING CEREMONY

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

*Strömstad, June 16*

The highest bridge in Europe—that which joins Norway and Sweden 200 feet above the Svine Sund, south of Fredrikshald—was officially opened to-day by King Haakon of Norway and the Crown Prince of Sweden, accompanied by Crown Princess Louise.

The construction of the bridge, which is 1260 feet long with one span of 465 feet, was begun in 1939 and was almost completed by Swedish engineers in 1942, when the German occupation forces were already established on the Norwegian side. The bridge was the scene of dramatic and often fatal attempts to escape from Norway during the war. In 1942 lightning exploded a mine on the Swedish side, destroying the second arch, and the restoration was postponed until the end of the war. After eight months' work the bridge, a majestic engineering achievement, which now re-establishes the main western Scandinavian motor route, was completed, costing more than 3,000,000 Swedish kronor.

In the presence of cheering crowds of Norwegians and Swedes King Haakon and the Swedish Crown Prince and Princess met in the centre of the bridge, and after speeches the party proceeded towards the Norwegian side, later returning to Strömstad for a banquet which was like a medieval ceremony.

There was dancing in the streets of Strömstad that night, and on the beaches and in the town, which seemed full of young

blonde men, wearing plus fours and coloured and tasselled skull caps, who had only recently emerged from four bitter years of oppression and hardship. . . .

In the morning under a clear sky sailing boats flying the Norwegian flag pushed out with young men and bare-legged lassies seated on their decks listening to running accordion music, at peace once more with life and nature.

Carrying my few belongings, I boarded the *Göteborg* at nine o'clock for the exciting journey down the Viking coast of Bohuslän to Gothenburg and the Göta Canal.

## CHAPTER XII

### DOWN THE VIKING COAST

*A futuro Normannorum libera nos.*

11th Century PRAYER IN THE WEST

IT WAS, I THINK, AT GRÄNNA, in Östergötland, in the English garden laid out by the English wife of the proprietor, the Baron von Dueben, in the Ribbagården estate on the shores of Lake Vänern, that I first saw a replica of the striking statuary group called the "*Bältesspännarna*", which means "The Belt (or Knife-) Wrestlers". The life-size original stands to-day beside the National Museum at Stockholm; and there is also a replica of it outside the public high school of the small town of Vänersborg, in the West of Sweden.

The group shows two Vikings of magnificent physique bound together round their waists by a leathern thong, and with their feet outstretched in utmost effort and tension. The right hand of each grasps over a loose leather band the blade of a long knife, with several inches of steel bare, the right wrist being seized in the left hand of each fighter in a desperate attempt to hold the point of his opponent's weapon away from his own naked midriff.

This was the horrific Viking mode of duelling. That it was usually fatal is evident from this description of the *Bältesspännarna* courteously sent to me by Hr. George B. Gauffin, one of the very able London correspondents of Stockholm's leading daily newspaper, the *Svenska Dagbladet*:

*Dear mr Coles,*

*mr Wickbom has given me your letter dated Mar 27 and I am most pleased to be able to answer it and give you those particulars wanted.*

*The statuary group about which we had a little talk wednesday last is made by F. P. Molin (1814-73) a wellknown Swedish sculptor. (I am not quite sure if my spelling of his name is correct, nor at what time he was born and so on, but I am sure you could find him in any encyclopedia.) The group which*

## DOWN THE VIKING COAST

is called "Bältesspännarna"—something like "The Knifewrestlers" or "The Beltwrestlers", the later of which is most correctly translated—is placed outside the National Museum in Stockholm and replicas are at several places.

The story of these wrestlers is as follows:

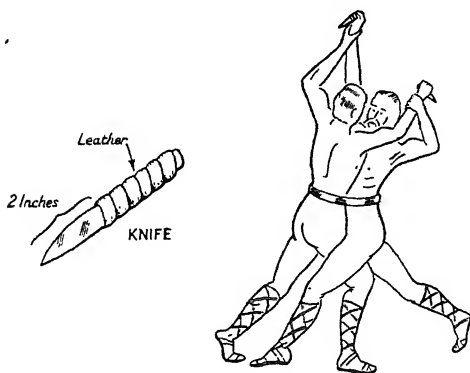
The old vikings were as you know very hot-headed (cf. berserks and berserker rage). There was not need of any big reason to make one of them call the other out. It could be that the one had libelled the other or taken his wife or any reason. Their duels were mostly at the way the statuary group shows. The one who was offended asked the other "How much can you stand of cold steel?" and the other answered: "As much as you". After that they were braced together at the waist, as close together as they were only able to move the upper parts of their bodies and of course the legs. Each of them had a knife of course, and these had no handles but were merely pieces of steel sharpened to a point and with an edge along the whole thing. Now they agreed on a certain length of the knives that should be used, for instance one inch or two inches. The rest of the knives were enveloped in leather. This done they began to fight, each of them his knife in the right hand and with the left hand he tried to prevent the other from hurting him. The fights were of course very dangerous and mostly they didn't finish untill one of the wrestlers was dead.

I hope you have understood my description and that you shall be able to use it. Tu be sure I have tried to make some drawings below.

Mr Wickborn asks me to send you his kindest regards.

Yours sincerely

George B. Gauffin



The name "Viking", or "wicing" in the old Norse current in the ninth and tenth centuries, meant "sea-warrior", and was the

nominative of the singular and the plural "*Vikingar*". "Vik" is modern Swedish for creek, inlet, or small fjord, and as all the Northern fleets which ravaged Western Europe assembled for their forays along the rocky, deeply indentured coasts of Norway and Bohuslän (then a part of Norway) and Denmark, it is easy to suppose that the term Viking (from "Viker", "inhabitants of creeks") originated in this manner.

That the ancient Svea, of Swithiod (i.e. Sweden), and early inhabitants of Skåne, had their ships cruising the Baltic in the days of the Romans we know from the evidence of Tacitus; and it may well have been that their vessels were shallow, narrow at the bows, and pointed at both ends as, from the evidence of Viking grave-stones found in Sweden and the complete Viking ship unearthed at Gorstad, in Norway, were those long ships which ranged the northern seas to Iceland, the Faroes, Greenland, and as far as "Vinland", i.e. the American continent, and whose crews ravaged the coasts of Britain, Ireland and North France between the ninth and twelfth centuries, besides penetrating from the Baltic all the major waterways of Russia and the continent of Europe. The astounding "lone voyage" in a single canoe from Raratonga to the North Cape of New Zealand about A.D. 930 of Kupe, a high-born native of Tahiti, the first outside man to set foot in New Zealand since the dawn of time (for the Maories were the first New Zealanders), has its northern counterpart in the solitary voyage of the Viking Leif Eriksson from Trondjem fjord to the American continent, which he discovered five centuries before Columbus was born, and named "Vinland" because where he landed the Indians made wine.<sup>1</sup>

Ireland was the object of frequent Viking raids in the ninth century of our era, and in the following century Norwegian kings

<sup>1</sup> "He was a large and strong man, of imposing looks, and wise and moderate in everything." Ancient Saga.

*The Discovery of America by the Vikings*—"Foster-father Tyrkar (i.e. from Turkey) said: 'I did not go much farther than you, but I can tell some news. I found a vine and grapes. . . . I was born where there was neither lack of vine nor grapes.' Leif named the land after its fruits, and called it *Vinland*." *Flatey garðbók*, I, 541, which also contains descriptions of tenth-century America and its coastal inhabitants.

of Ireland sat on thrones in Dublin itself.<sup>1</sup> In fact, those famous Irish round towers, of which a perfect example may be seen among the haunted and lovely ruins of Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, were specifically designed as a refuge for the monks of St. Kevin from the "furore Normannorum"; although how a community existed for weeks sealed and cooped up inside such a confined and up-ended stone tube defeats the imagination. Anglo-Saxons did not possess the gumption to build similar refuges along the East Coast of England, where their farms and steadings were frequently the scene of sudden massacre and incendiarism, mostly, it must be said, from the hot-tempered and bloodthirsty Danish Vikings.

Vikings from Svealand, the ancient Swedish kingdom whose seat was Uppsala, actually founded the great Russian Empire, known before their time as a vast inchoate land mass under the old Swedish name of Gårdarike; and the very name "Russia" originated with early settlers from the district of Roslagen, in Uppland (from the rowing teams on the Viking warships, "*rodsbyggjar*"). Thus is history made. Therefore Charles XII was only following in the footsteps of early Swedish colonisers when he undertook his heroic but ill-fated campaign against the Slavs.

For more than a century Vikings provided the bodyguard of the emperors of Byzantium at Constantinople, as Swiss halberdiers have formed the Pope's guard in Rome (and died, when necessary, to a man at their posts) since the days of Raphael and Michelangelo. And that their companions ranged the Adriatic, the Ægean, and reached Greece itself and the shores of Asia Minor, finds proof in the Viking runic inscription on the Lion of St. Mark, which was brought by the Venetians from the Piræus in the fifteenth century and perched on its Doric column above the water-steps on the riva Schiavone.

<sup>1</sup> Little is known (according to *Whitaker*) of the history of Ireland until the invasions of Northmen towards the close of the eighth century A.D. The Norwegians were distinguished as Findgaill (White Strangers) and the Danes as Dubgaill (Black Strangers), while the name of Ireland itself is held to be derived from the Scandinavian *Ira-land* (land of the Irish). At the battle of Clontarf (1014) the Scandinavian power in Ireland was finally broken.



The fact is not generally appreciated that William the Conqueror was by blood, character and ruthlessness in war, a true Viking. "He was taller and stronger than others, and a good rider; a very great warrior, but rather cruel. Very wise, but it was said not trustworthy." (*Harald Hardradi's Saga*.)<sup>1</sup> In the Bayeux tapestry, some sections of which in illuminated copies are on display in the interesting Ethnological Museum in Gothenburg, his tall, athletic figure and pure Nordic features beneath the close-fitting Norman casque, are at once conspicuous. The very term "Norman" reveals his origin, "man from the North", for, as everyone knows, Normandy was permanently settled by Scandinavian invaders during the age of the Viking migrations, and although the stock is now merged unrecognisably with the native Latin strain, in 1066 the "man from the North" was easily picked out because of his tallness and broadness and fair colouring, from the shorter and darker Gauls, who were merely serfs when "Neustria" was granted to the invaders as a fief by the French king.

That the invaders and conquerors of England who set sail from the Normandy coast were, in fact, and purely and simply, Vikings is further indicated by the design of the ships in which they crossed the Channel. These, again, as depicted on the Bayeux tapestry, were exactly similar in design to that of the Viking vessels drawn on the memorial grave-stones the Vikings set up in Gotland, and on the Swedish mainland, that is, low in the water, with long, curved prows, and with the shields of the warriors ranged like a wall along the sides. Moreover, they had the square, rigged sail still to be seen on the yachts and pleasure craft sailing the summer waters of the Bohuslän fjords, even as the Greek caïque is substantially the same as the strong "black ship" of Odysseus, and the lateen sail of the Nile boats of ancient Egypt, as memorialised in the reliefs and friezes in the tombs of Saqqarah and the Valley of the Kings, is to be seen to this day in the

<sup>1</sup> "... in the year 1066 the grandson of a Norse pirate was recognised as King of England. Why should we ever read fairy stories, when the truth of history is so much more interesting and entertaining." *The Story of Mankind*, Hendrik Van Loon.

feluccas with their long bamboo masts which ply between the Delta, Cairo and Luxor.

Thus is history a vital, living thing, with themes and motifs and links surviving and carrying on down the centuries to repeat for us the veritable sights and sounds of a thousand, two thousand, or three thousand years ago.<sup>1</sup>

The cruise down the coast of Bohuslän was, in truth, like nothing else in my experience (for I have never cruised in the Hebrides, which doubtless it resembles); indeed I might have been on another planet, so completely different and distinct were the bare islets of solid granite and the shelving rock-formations of the deeply indentured fjords and inlets—all bare, absolutely bare, of any vegetation whatsoever. It is this unique character which makes the Bohuslän coastal towns and fishing villages a very favourite holiday ground for people from Stockholm and Gothenburg and other parts of Sweden from mid-June to September; for the young swim all day in the clear, salty sea, or bake in the sunshine stretched out on the antediluvian rock, or go fishing or sailing in the minimum of covering, while in the evening they dine and dance at the elegant restaurants, and return to sleep in the plain but spotless homes of the fisherfolk clustered along the ledges of the rocks. The air is crystal clear and full of saline, so that well-formed bodies glow with health and tan within a few days of arrival. And on not so remote platforms of granite, or half-hidden coves, statuesque Swedish maidens lie naked in the luxuriating, life-giving sun, which may shock the unco' guid but not the souls of artists who deplore the generations of feminine loveliness lost irretrievably to human view by the use of clothes.

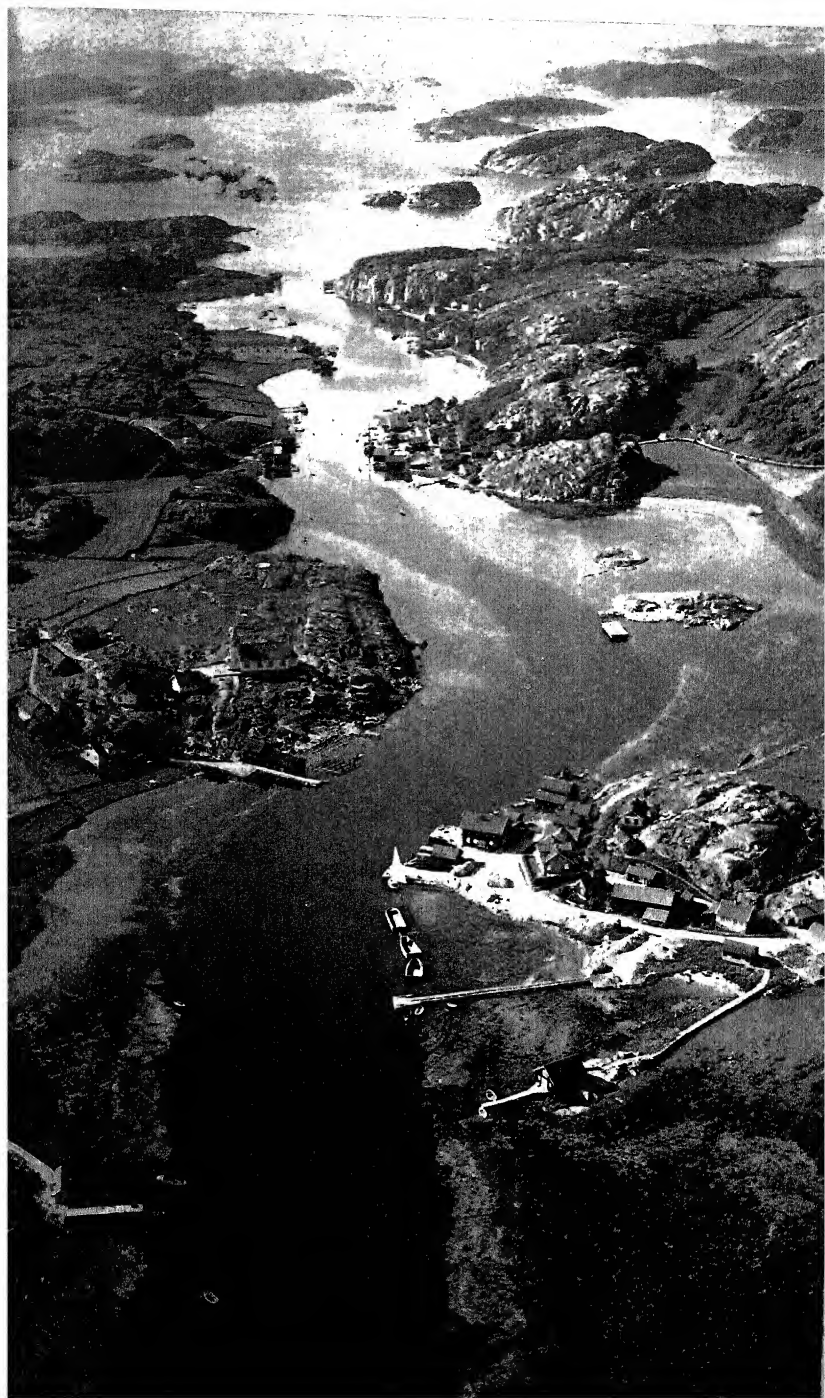
With all this bareness (no pun intended), one might question how the Vikings grew their crops or raised their cattle; but the answer is soon evident on penetrating into the interior a short way, where fine, flat pastoral country opens to view, idyllic in appearance and evocative, even at this late day, of the incredible part

<sup>1</sup> A vivid, rollicking novel of the Viking Age by Frans G. Bengtsson, entitled *Röde Orm—Sjöfarande i Västerled*, appeared in Stockholm in 1946.

this coast has played in the development of human destiny. For Bohuslän is extremely rich in prehistoric remains besides the memorials of Viking occupation, in grave-mounds thousands of years old, and in crude but animated rock-paintings of inhabitants of early epochs engaged in hunting, climbing, or venturing out in their boats which even in those days had curving prows. Here, too, is met with again the *gårdsgård*, the ancient mode of fencing *fält* (common root with our word, "field"), and the old Viking tracks and narrow roads leading across country, but not far into the interior, for impenetrable forests covered central Sweden in the early ages. . . .

The Göteborg suddenly began to pitch and heave on a long, rolling swell from the open sea, and I immediately sought the sanctuary of the lounge to rest prone for some minutes on a couch; for it seemed to me that it would be very undignified for one of the salt breed, who was born and bred by an English sea, to be sick while sailing down the historic coast once peopled by the greatest sea-warriors of all time, with the single exception of the ancient Greeks. At Gravarna the swell subsided, and passing Smögen, one of the largest fishing centres and a popular summer resort, with near by the isle of Tryggön on which Olav Tryggveson, was buried in 963 beneath a mound of stones still to be seen there, I emerged on deck again and enjoyed an easy stomach for the remainder of the twelve-hours' voyage.

Here, near Smögen, I remembered, was the family seat of my friend, the late Baron Harold de Bildt, for fourteen years Swedish Minister at Cairo where I used to meet him in the Beyt el Kretlea, the seventeenth-century "house of the Cretan" (an Egyptian El Greco?) which had been exquisitely fitted up as a museum for his Oriental art collection by the late El Lewa Gayer-Anderson Pasha; or taking Swedish visitors round the marvellous Tutankhamen exhibits in the National Museum at Kasr-el Nil. The Baron had presented me with prints of photographs he had taken in Dalecarlia, including one of the former nurse of the beautiful and ill-fated Queen Astrid, daughter of the venerable and handsome Prince Carl of Sweden; and I had





last seen him at the funeral service in the chapel of the hospital where she died of poor Inga Dahln, who first nourished a wish in me to visit Sweden, and who had so unhappily succumbed from thrombosis after an operation. She came from Luleå, in the north of Sweden, and an English captain recovering from fever in the same hospital told me at Assuan a year later that he had wept when she died—"she was so nice," he said. Three days before her entry into hospital I had talked with her in her new office in the Swedish Legation in Cairo. She smiled much and seemed to have no fear. We talked about Charles XII, and she laughed as she described how he hunted bears on foot alone in the forests around Stockholm at the age of fourteen. . . .

At Stångehuvud promontory a school of giant "whales" seemed to be floating absolutely still on the velvety, glittering water—they were rocks and skerries whose curious rounded shapes here are polished absolutely smooth by the action of sea and ice. White foam was breaking splendidly against them, like in "faery lands forlorn".

At a wooden quayside to which we presently came boxes of fish from the Swedish Red Cross were being loaded on board a vessel bound for the Piræus and the starving people of Greece. At Lysekil, from where, during the war, British navy men would rush urgently needed supplies of ball-bearings from "neutral Sweden" across the North Sea, in the teeth of German patrol boats and submarines waiting outside the three-mile limit, the British Vice-Consul at Uddevalla, Mr. Charles Thorburn, disembarked after courteously inviting me to make the return journey from Gothenburg to Oslo the following year on one of the steamships of the company, of which he was a director.

Soon we passed the curiously named fishing hamlet and summer resort of Fiskabäckskil, and later approached the coastal town and harbour of Marstrand, whose seventeenth-century fortress is a landmark for miles around and one of the first features of the Västergötland shore perceived from the decks of transatlantic liners arriving in the Göta Canal.

At Gothenburg the captain of the *Göteborg*, to whom Mr.

Thorburn had spoken previously on my behalf, confirmed by warm and wonderful sign language that I was at liberty to remain on board the steamer for two or three nights, before she commenced the return voyage to Oslo, because of the extreme shortage of accommodation in the town; and each time the matronly ship's cook brought hot water, coffee, or a meal into the tiny cabin, she curtsied low and exclaimed with a broad smile: "Var så god, herrn. . . ."

Next morning I found that I was the only male left on board: *ergo*, I was in command! And what is the use of being in command of a ship if you do not use your authority, especially when the cabin you occupy was occupied only a short while before by a Crown Prince.

"Cook!"—I rehearsed in my mind, as she curtsied even lower after laying the crowded breakfast tray in my lap—"Don't run away, cook; take heed to the royal, imperial, oecumenical commands! Bring in caviare with the cocktails to-night, cook, caviare from the monstrous Russia which Sweden first conquered, colonised, named, and now fears: and for dinner I will have, *smörgås*, much *smörgås*, boiled turbot with *crème de Bohuslän*, and new potatoes cooked in lashuns of real butter from Skåne; a coupe *glâce med frukte*, and a bottle of Swedish *punch* with which I used to toast my home port in Sussex when taking the wheel in mid-Channel on the bridge of the good cargo ship *Bardaland*, bound from Alexandria and Malta for Malmö with cattle-food and onions. Oh, and cook, be so good as to ennoble the table in the salon with two demijohns of Mendoza *tinto* wine in cane cradles. Cook, you may now leave the Presence. I have spoken."

But, alas, there was nobody on board to translate!

## CHAPTER XIII

### HOLIDAY AT SMÖGEN

*To be a poet is to see.*

IBSEN

A HOLIDAY, HOWEVER BRIEF, spent at the extraordinary and fantastic Bohuslän resort of Smögen is an unforgettable experience.

From Gothenburg there are alternative sea, land and air services; but as I had done the coastwise journey in reverse, as described in the previous chapter, from Strömstad, I decided on this occasion to follow the land route, and so took the train one afternoon to Dingle, from where a white bus conveys travellers bound for the rocky isle situated half a mile out in the open sea on which Smögen is situated, to the large fishing settlement of Gravarna, where the ferry is taken.

This island journey northward from Gothenburg is full of interest and beauty. Some of the views which unfold on either side of the line all the way to Dingle are quite enchanting: views of deep woods and wide lush meadows where the fine Bohuslän horses and cattle graze, with here and there a bright and tidy township. In the early Middle Ages and for centuries afterwards the woods formed the boundaries of the Viking communities, for deep and impenetrable forests separated in those days western from central and eastern Sweden. The country was then divided into two separate kingdoms, Gotland and Svealand.

Therefore it is not difficult for the modern traveller to visualise the green and pastoral countryside as it was in far-off times; for the contours of the land are the same, as are also the broad meadows which, like inland lakes and rivers, are sometimes flanked by steep and massive rock and limestone formations. In these very meadows the Vikings bred their plump bay horses and gathered the hay for feeding them in the long winters in square wagons



with low wheels and descending shafts, just like those in use to this day by the local yeoman-farmers. Here, too, is everywhere in evidence—as on Gotland—the *gårdsgård* or Viking mode of fencing, with untrimmed poles laid in sloping angle-fashion between stakes and held in place by twisted branches.

On the platform of one of the small stations *en route* to Dingle I saw a passenger who had just alighted sweep off his hat like an old-time courtier when approaching the stationmaster for some information (and certainly stationmasters in Sweden, who are usually tall and handsome, look very imposing and important people, in their uniforms of fine black cloth with red facings, and wearing their magnificent gold-peaked caps). . . .

The bus from Dingle (did Vikings from Bohuslän settle that other "Dingle", on the west coast of Ireland?) moved down the wide and sloping road from the station, and soon we were roaring through green and open plains flanked by woods and towering rock-formations, on our way to Gravarna, which was reached about five o'clock. Here I boarded the ferry, which is just a converted fishing smack, and a few minutes later we were gliding across a glassy and turquoise sea into a low landing-quay and a cluster of fishermen's huts, which looked for all the world like prehistoric lake-dwellings built on piles. A man appeared from the Smögenbaden Summer Restaurant, took my bag, and telephoned for the address of the private house where a room had been reserved, for there are no hotels on the island and all holiday-makers put up with the local inhabitants, which adds to the warmth and intimacy of the experience.

Accommodation had been arranged at a medium-sized house "built on a rock" and inhabited by a family bearing the not un-English name of Lawrenson, and as I walked up the winding, rock-bound road to my destination, past attractive and well-filled shops, and bungalows with bright window-boxes, I pondered on how such a name originated on the Viking Coast, as no doubt the inhabitants of Palos pondered on the strangeness of an Irishman, William Staunton, and an Englishman, Richard Lawes, embarking in the *Santa Maria* with Columbus on his first voyage of discovery to "Cipango".

When we reached the timbered, two-storied house and I was introduced to my landlady, I could discern nothing English in her appearance, for she was tall and broad and quite definitely a Nordic type.

She knew no English either, but made it clear enough that I was welcome to occupy either a first- or a second-floor room. Both were equally spotless, tidy and tastefully furnished; but I chose the upper room for its unique view across the expanse of white rock and the scattered houses, and the hard tennis court below, where swarthy youths in white shirts, or bare-waisted, and shorts capered about energetically in the early mornings and evenings, for it was far too hot to play during the day.

There was a splendid view, too, through the wide windows of the Smögenbaden restaurant, where the food and cooking were first class, across an immense expanse of empty rock to the sea. The sea beckoned irresistibly on that first evening, and I wandered out to watch the setting sun turn water and rock to glinting gold and then to scintillating copper in the clear and pure air for which Smögen is also famous.

And in the morning, after I had solved the problem of consuming "brunch"—for everybody partakes of a combined lunch and breakfast, including a huge plate of smörgåsbord in that place, remaining out all day and dining to the wailing dance-music of a Stockholm quartet from seven to ten in the evening—I descended steps to a cleft in the living rock (but *is* rock alive?) and walked through a sunken road to a flight of wooden steps which in turn led on to the bathing places.

Oh, how transparently clear was the water as one poised above it on giant stone or jutting springboard for that first ecstatic dive, with each pebble and sea-plant visible to the naked eye as in the South Seas! Oh, how delicious the shock of the cold sea-water and its trickling caress as one cleaved one's way below the immense ledges of antediluvian rock formations, from one point to another! And afterwards, when the mothering ocean had drawn one back many times into its cool green depths, how glorious was the feel of the hot sun on one's glistening body as one lay out-stretched and luxuriating under the great

blue arc of the sky! Was not all this in itself, and in essence—holiness?

Across the water the coast swept round in a wide bay, or *vik*, where were many isolated ledges on which figures, and very good figures too, could be picked out—again with the naked eye—promenading or just sun-bathing like big salamanders. On one occasion I returned from a long swim to find a connoisseur of a respectable middle-age slowly sweeping all the occupied ledges with his binoculars! The great god Pan is certainly not dead yet at Smögen, nor, indeed, in other parts of Sweden, whatever the Delphic Oracle, in her last recorded utterance, announced from her “throne” on the Omphala Stone, “the world’s navel” (which I have seen), during the reign of Theodosius; which is probably one of the reasons why the place is crammed with holidaymakers from Stockholm during July and August. . . .

In the evenings I liked to take a constitutional through the older part of the town, to where the fishermen’s habitations and huts were situated, and the small hushed inlets where their boats, all gleaming with new coatings of white paint, lay tethered to the wharves, or went *chug-chugging* out to the night’s fishing-grounds. Here the fisherwomen would be washing clothes from wooden steps, emptying buckets of rubbish, or carrying baskets of newly caught fish to some packing depot; while others, including grey and wrinkled old grandmothers, would just recline in their low doorways enjoying the evening sun and the mere animal function of existing.

Everywhere the nostrils were assailed by the strong salty smell of fishing nets and tar and rope; and all sounds seemed hushed by the primordial character of Nature’s handiwork there, and the soft whisperings of the water. The eyes, too, were continually feasted with colour, with the colours of the houses, and the boats, with the chromatic pageantry of the flowers, with the sublime hues of the spectacular sunsets, and with the vivid tints of the summer visitors’ holiday attire; for spring and summer in Sweden bring everywhere a riot of bright colours not only in *flora* but also in the frocks and beach costumes worn by the women and children. . . .

I used often to go down to a small café overlooking the landing stage, to partake of real coffee and cream and home-made pastries, while I wrote, or watched the steamers coming in from the Soten Canal on their way to Lysekil and Marstrand. The café terrace was a good place, too, to study Smögen types, and once I was rewarded by witnessing the prettiest piece of island wooing between a handsome young mechanic (to judge by his overalls) and a golden-haired girl wearing white drill shorts and a linen pull-over worked with flowers. They were completely oblivious to everything but each other as they smiled rapturously, and gazed unwaveringly into each other's eyes. Presently the youth, in a sudden nonchalant way, gave one of the fröken's shapely white knees a squeeze, and they both jumped up and went off arm in arm and chattering gaily away up the narrow main street towards the ice-cream and hot sausage stalls.

On my last evening at Smögen I went walking for hours over the rocks, across miles of bare and polished volcanic strata which had been there since the earth cooled, right to the uttermost edge, from where I watched the great burning disc of the sun light up the sea until the water looked like an immense floor of incandescent aluminium, as in some of the water-colours of Giorgio de Chirico. I had the world to myself and could imagine all time and all history, and see my own life like a single stitch in the endless loom of eternity. . . .

Returning rather late by way of one of the less-frequented swimming pools I saw two white and ghostly figures alight on the rocks and presently take a header into the water, which was all ashine in the afterglow of the brilliant northern sunset. The night was hot and the sea looked irresistibly inviting, so I soon divested myself of my own clothes—there were not many—and joined the "ghosts" in their moonlight bathe. Presently we emerged dripping globules of silver and alabaster and sat in a group on some rocks talking for a while.

It transpired that the apparitions were the local bank manager and the schoolmaster, and I learned more from them in fifteen minutes about the Bohuslän fishing industry and the summer

## BOHUSLÄN

season at Smögen than from all the books on Sweden that I ever read. I also learned the name of the little brutes that had stung me all over in the cool and delicious water—*mygg*. “The sting will all be gone in half an hour,” said the schoolmaster.

Other stings my friend, I thought, take longer dispersing; and some remain for life.

## BOOK II

*Many a fair smooth lake held a mirror of light to the mountains,  
Picturing forth the forests, where elks with towering antlers  
Stalked with the gait of kings, and drank from rivulets countless.  
And in the valleys around, far pastured abroad o'er the meadows,  
Herds with glittering hides, and udders that yearned for the milking.*

FRITHIOF'S INHERITANCE

*Let me, however, mention that Sweden consists entirely of one continued rock of granite, covered in different places with a greater or less quantity of earth. . . .*

A JOURNEY THROUGH SWEDEN. Written in French by a Dutch officer, and translated into English by Wm. R. Radcliffe, B.A., of Oriel College, Oxford (London, 1789).



## IN ÖSTERGÖTLAND

### CHAPTER XIV

#### THE PASTORAL HEART

*Heard you ne'er cowbells, heard you ne'er singing  
Stray down the meadow at evening fall?  
Cows low their answer and quicken the swinging  
Stride of their pace at the milk-maid's call . . .  
Faintly the voices recede from the meadow,  
Wander and scatter and die far away. . .  
Co', Lily—co', Lily—co'!*

GUSTAF FRÖDING, *Pastoral* <sup>1</sup>

I BOARDED THE LITTLE canal steamer *Ceres* at the Lilla Bommen quay in Gothenburg and climbed up to the observation-deck to await our departure. Bright sunshine was cascading down on to the clean, leafy, and well-designed harbour city, "Town of the Goths", which architects from Amsterdam had laid out in 1619 to the orders of the great Gustavus Adolphus, whose statue by Fogelberg, showing the king pointing to where the city is to rise, overlooks the Great Harbour Canal and the Gustavus Adolphus Square.

Soon the moorings were cast off and we glided out into the Göta-älv, turning northwards and passing presently the ruined Bohus fortress, the tapering spires and clustering roofs of Gothenburg slowly fading in distance behind us. Now opened out on either side meadows teeming with wildflowers, with high woods beyond. Boys were bathing from a sandy cove, or running naked along the green bank; and farther along a woman sat on the grass in the sunshine knitting, with a child tumbling about her knees and only a garment gathered below her waist for covering—a Rembrandt aquatint come to life!

Sleek Friesian cows grazed knee-deep in the meadows, while

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Charles Wharton Stork. From *Selected Poems by Gustaf Fröding* (Macmillan, New York, 1916).



ahead the turquoise breast of the river reached in sweeping curves through the arcadian countryside, with here and there a canoe whose occupants waved a greeting as we passed and then resumed their rhythmic paddling. A motor-launch emerged from a boathouse and shot ahead towards a blue and green horizon.

At noon we reached the locks at Trollhättan, charmingly situated amid its surrounding hills and forests, where the steamer passes two hours rising a hundred feet. Passengers stepped ashore to walk to the waterfalls, or visit the famous State electric power station which supplies the whole Gothenburg region, besides the largest part of the provinces of Västergötland, Bohuslän and Dalsland, with electric energy; and afterwards I strolled on alone by the upper canal and sat down beneath a silver birch to enjoy the views on such a glorious day and savour to the full the *dolce far niente* of the moment.

"The Göta Canal," I read in an official booklet which I still keep for its admirable English and estimable conciseness, "has come to be the collective name for the whole system of canals, rivers, and lakes which afford a navigable passage right across the Swedish mainland, between Gothenburg and the North Sea and Stockholm on the Baltic. The difference in levels on this cross-country water-route is more than 300 feet which is overcome by means of a number of locks. Of the total length of 240 miles only about 56 miles represent artificial canals." What the booklet did not say was that the idea for the canal first arose in the resourceful mind of Charles XII as an alternative route to the sea journey down the Kattegat and round Skåne, because of the extortionate tolls demanded by the Danes at Helsingör (Hamlet's Elsinor) although, as a matter of fact, the Göta Canal was not completed and open for full navigation until 1832. . . .

We were soon aboard again, with the *Ceres* (charming name, smacking of the Golden Age!) steaming slowly out of the last of the Trollhättan locks and past another steamer returning from Stockholm, whose passengers waved their greetings as their vessel took the place of ours in the locks for the downward journey to Gothenburg. At Vänersborg, from where the geologically interesting mountains of Halleberg and Hunneberg are easily

visited, we entered Lake Vänern, the largest lake in Europe outside Russia, as I said in Chapter four, where the tiny steamer forged ahead towards an immense watery horizon, with no land in sight, although somewhere to the south lay the enormous Läckö Castle, dating from the seventeenth century and boasting five towers and 250 rooms.

Glimpses of wild bird life or natural scenery on the few islets passed brought to mind the nature studies of Bruno Liljefors, the Landseer of Sweden but untrammelled by Victorian tradition or purse-strings in Threadneedle Street.

Soon there was the welcome sound of a gong, and we all trooped down from the observation-deck to the small dining-saloon, where the sideboard was literally crowded with the various succulent dishes of the Swedish smörgåsbord, which is certainly not the least of the glories of this remarkable country. A queue was formed and passengers took their turn in approaching the sideboard, where they helped themselves to delicious *Sill* (herrings), *Rökt lax* (smoked salmon), sardines, anchovies, omelette or egg pie, boiled potatoes, salads, vegetable mayonnaise, *smör* (butter—compare our word “smear”)<sup>1</sup>, and the various varieties of bread, and *Svensk ost*, Swedish cheese, which is uncommonly good. A *snaps* before this repast, and a Pilsener to wash it down, with a good coffee to end up with, certainly brought no wave of depression or suicidal mania upon any fellow passenger to my knowledge.

Through the wide saloon windows stretched the immense surface of the lake, while Nature's Midas, “that glorious lamp of heaven, the Sun”, touched water, islets and finally the approaching shore to gold. At Sjötorp the waterway connecting Vänern to the Baltic, the real Göta Canal began—Sjötorp, an idyllic spot where the steamer started the ascent through more locks to Lake Viken, the highest point of the canal.

Between Sjötorp and Toreboda the scenery became truly arcadian, the very essence of the pastoral, with flat green meadowlands on

<sup>1</sup> The Swedish “Smör” (butter) is—like “Idrottir” (exercise)—the original Viking word, viz.: “Thorolf Smjör (named so because he said Iceland was so fertile that butter dripped from every blade of grass) was the son of Thorstein Skrofa, son of Grim, who was worshipped after his death on account of his popularity.” *Landnama*, I, ch. 14.

either hand and an occasional red-timbered dwelling embowered in trees, and a fringe of tall silver birches along the canal which here is sometimes so narrow that often there is no more than an inch or two to spare on either side as the steamer squeezes its way between the walls, or past some traffic or foot bridge. The banks were indeed so near that the branches of the trees frequently came sweeping across the observation-deck itself, making everybody duck to avoid a scratching. It was two hours after midnight, yet the light was radiant as on an English summer eve, and all conspired to induce that feeling of sweet repose which has been adequately recorded once and for all by Thomas Dekker and Andrew Marvell.

Approaching the beautiful headland of Vanäs Udde, where the canal steamers enter Lake Vättern, a flight of wild swans passed overhead, and I held my breath at the beauty of the sight which I had never met with before. Less than three hours later we had reached one of the most historic towns in Sweden, Vadstena, with an aesthetically satisfying castle, beautifully situated, built by Gustavus Vasa himself, who was here elected Regent.

Vadstena is a town of spacious white homes, smiling gardens, shady woods, and of "lake water lapping low", whose night skies and enchanting light effects are as magical as when Saint Birgitta herself lived there seven hundred years ago. In a situation of supreme peacefulness, which is still redolent of medieval Catholic Sweden, she established a double foundation for monks and nuns in the middle of the fourteenth century, which became the parent of numerous convents in other parts of Europe, notably of the Sion house on the banks of the Thames near Twickenham, now the seat of the Dukes of Northumberland.<sup>1</sup> That atmosphere of spiritual security and immemorial peace which seems to cling to the Catholic foundations in Europe is certainly to be found in the "Blue Church", and the Bridgettine Convent at Vadstena which—when I last visited it—was presided over by an English Prioress.

It took the persistent St. Bridget the whole twenty-three years of her residence in Rome to win the Pope's consent to the

<sup>1</sup> From Iver, Buckinghamshire, I am an occasional visitor to the Bridgettine convent at Iver Heath, the cultured Prioress of which is a Swedish Finn.

foundation of her Order. But that masterful woman not only gained her point in this connection, but she was also directly instrumental in bringing the Popes back from their long exile at Avignon, where, if I remember rightly, at least one—Sylvester—is buried in the chapel of the massive Palace of the Popes there.

The Klosterkyrkan, or "Blue Church" as it is known from the bluish quality of the limestone used in its construction (or the "Palm Church" from its beautiful arches), is an immensely imposing building, conveying an impression of great spaciousness and light. Here St. Bridget, whose remains had been brought all the way from Rome by her daughter, St. Katherine, who had blue eyes and a fair complexion and "looked like some graceful silver birch near a strong Scotch pine", was interred in 1374, and there are several other tombs of interest, including the marble sarcophagus of Duke Magnus of Östergötland, third son of Gustavus Vasa, who died in 1595, and the English princess Philippa, daughter of Henry IV (Bolingbroke) and Queen of Erik XIII, who died in 1430.

Vadstena has, moreover, a fourteenth-century Town Hall, the best preserved of its kind in Sweden, where I passed a pleasant hour; but an incongruous note is added by an asylum which occupies the site of the former Bishop's Palace, and whose unfortunate inmates were to be seen grimacing and wildly gesticulating at the windows.

## CHAPTER XV

### ECHOES OF UNHAPPY FAR-OFF THINGS

*Then stood I forth and cried—"War cometh near;  
The foeman's shields upon our borders clash."*

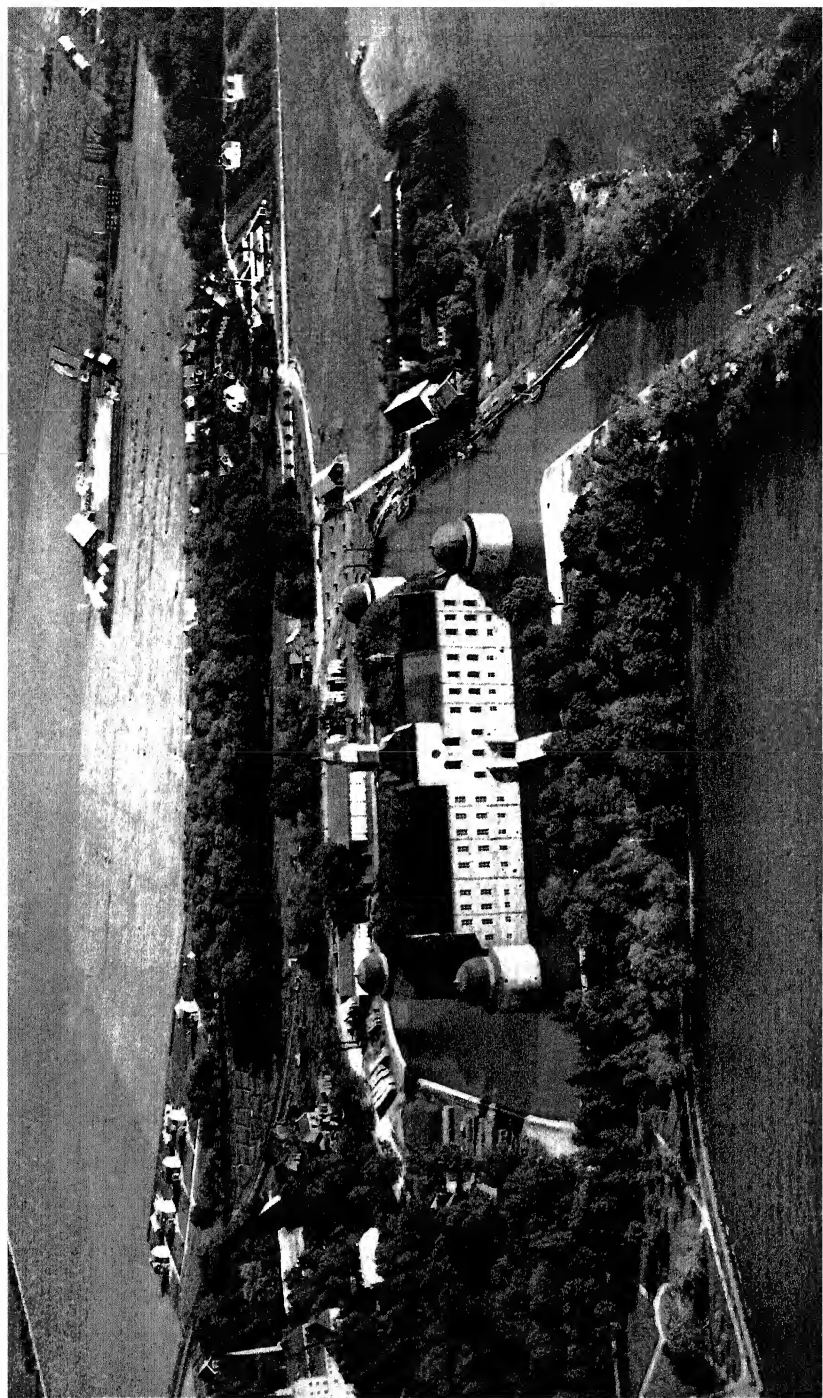
*Frithiof's Saga*

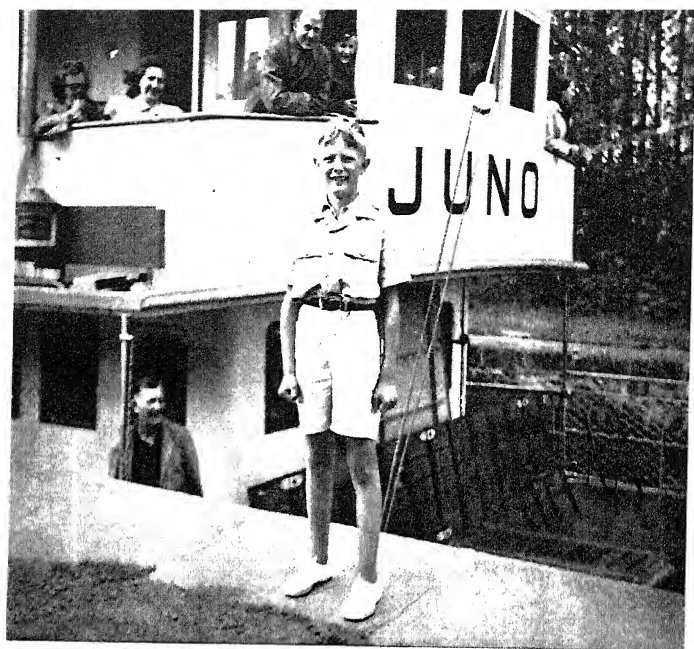
ON THE SECOND OCCASION that I journeyed to Stockholm by this captivating Göta Canal route before the War of 1939-45 I left the steamer at Vadstena for a week's exploration of the veritable heart of Östergöthia, which has relics of man's inhabitation going back for at least ten thousand years. The genial harbour-master at Vadstena, Captain Jungdahl, ran us out in his car past a summer home of the late Prince Eugen to an ancient *Domarring*, or "Circle of Judges", composed of twenty-four huge upright stones, in a flower-strewn meadow where sleek, long-maned mares roamed, whisking their long tails around, with their darling foals: a rare place embowered in trees and breathing the very spirit of *Frithiof's Saga*:

I reached the Ting, where stand our fathers' tombs,  
And round its grassy side, shield crowding shield,  
And sword in hand, the Northland's sons arrayed;  
Our ring within another gathered, stood  
Up to the summit: on the judging-stone,  
Like a dark thunder-cloud, King Helge sate,—  
The pallid sacrificer, with forbidding looks,  
And by him, thoughtless, leaning on his sword,  
A fair, well-fashioned youth, King Halfdan sate.  
Then stood I forth, and cried—"War cometh near;  
The foemen's shields upon our borders clash.  
King Helge, peril threateneth thy realm. . . .

These old old *Domarring* and *Ting*-places, with their circles of enormous stones still *in situ*, are encountered in many parts of *Vestergöthia* and *Östergöthia*, and they are not confined to Sweden, nor even to Scandinavia, for imaginative evidence

*In Östergötland: "Sweden's most beautiful Renaissance monument"—Vadstena Castle, built by Gustavus Vasa after his elevation to the throne in 1523.*





indicates that Stonehenge itself was one, and that there were others in England is conclusively proved in H. J. Massingham's now classic *Downland Man*.

It was, I think, after driving some distance from the Domarring that we came to "Swan Lake", the incredible Lake Tåkern where three thousand wild swans dwell and breed among the reeds and the wild water-lilies—a permanent, living ballet of lyrical bird-life where Tschaikovsky's exquisite music would be even more appropriate than at Covent Garden or the Metropolitan Opera House. The car stopped suddenly on a high stretch of road, and I was handed a pair of binoculars and instructed to look beyond the green, cloud-dappled cornfields at a gleaming breast of sun-sequined lake water, guarded by high vegetation. Presently, across the Jena lens, in stately procession glided a string of white swans with their young cygnets, and above the lake and the high reeds other blobs of Chinese white plummeted through the air, necks outstretched and with their feet folded under their snowy breasts like the folded undercarriages of aeroplanes.

One afternoon the proprietor of the hotel at Mount Omberg introduced us to the self-appointed guardian of "Swan Lake", a highly interesting Swedish type of sky-blue eyes, a shy smile, and of few but courteous words. This man would take us out, said our host, in his own shallow boat through the reeds and the water-lilies so that we could see some of the wild swans in their nests. "Sometimes they get fierce in the breeding season, and attack anyone who comes near," he added; "and if you fall into the water no foothold is secure and the lake bed is a quicksand." As my wife was with me on this occasion, I deemed it prudent to decline such a thrilling adventure, even though the guardian explained in his musical Swedish which the hotel proprietor slowly translated, that "we should be quite safe with him".

Outside Rök Church we saw a runic stone five feet high, containing what is claimed to be the longest piece of runic writing extant (how like the as yet undeciphered sign language of the ancient Minoans, preserved in the museum at Candia, in Crete, is the runic script) containing a description of a Viking expedition.



And inside the church's cool and white interior, where contemporary portraits hung by the pulpit of those architects of the Reformation, Luther and Melanchthon, who, however, so disastrously divided the body politic of Christian unity, a large net was preserved in which the last wolf seen in this region was caught a century ago.

Gipsies waved from outside their tents as we drove on to the lovely, peaceful ruins of the twelfth-century Cistercian Abbey of Alvastra, the oldest abbey ruins in the country, situated near a pile dwelling considered to date from 2000 to 1500 B.C. Here St. Bridget's husband, of Nericia, retired to a cell to end his days upon returning with her to their castle home and their eight children from a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James at Compostella, Spain, where I too have been on pilgrimage.

St. Bridget herself, who is described in one Scandinavian guide book as "the most remarkable woman of her own age, *and for that matter of all time* (my italics)" was also a frequent visitor to Alvastra Abbey where her confessor was a cenobite, and it may even be that she wrote in this heavenly spot Chapter 11 of her *Revelations*, which seems to take a pretty grim view of the inexorability of the Almighty's displeasure "of a man and woman who had married without regard to the laws of the church".

I beheld in spirit a devil holding a trident in his hand, and one foot armed with three sharp, pointed claws.

"Oh, Judge," cried he, "behold my hour is at last arrived; until now I waited and kept silence. It is now time to speak."

The Judge being seated on his tribunal surrounded by myriads of angels, a man and a woman presented themselves before Him. The Judge said to them: "Although I know all you have done during your life, speak according to your conscience, for the instruction of those who listen to you." The man answered: "We knew the laws of the Church, which forbade us to be united in marriage, and we disregarded them, we even despised them."

The Judge said: "Since you had no desire to obey your Lord, you must now be delivered over to the malice of the executioner of the decrees of His justice."

Then the devil darted one of his claws into the hearts of the man and woman, who appeared to be crushed under the pressure.

The Judge then addressed the spouse: "It is thus, my daughter, those ought to be punished who leave their Creator to attach themselves to the creature." Then, addressing the guilty pair He said, "I gave you a bag to be filled with the fruits in which I most delight, have you brought me them?" The woman answered: "We only sought luxurious pleasures, and the fruit we bring is shame and ignominy."

"Chastise them as they deserve," said the Judge to the demon. Then the infernal angel plunged another claw into their bowels, the whole interior parts of which were horribly lacerated.

"This," said our Lord to the spouse, "is the punishment reserved for those who transgress the law, and convert into poison what they ought only to seek as a remedy."

The Judge again said to the guilty couple, "What use have you made of the riches I confided to you, and for which you knew I should one day demand the interest?" They both replied, "We made a bad use of those riches: despising all eternal benefits we sought but those of the world."

"Do your duty," said the Judge to the executioner. The devil then drove his third claw into the hearts, bowels and feet of the guilty, and their bodies were so horribly disfigured that they appeared to be no more to me than under the forms of two balls . . .<sup>1</sup>

A short walk from the ruins stood the Mount Omberg Turisthotellet, where, in 1938, the kindly Austrian proprietor and his Swedish wife had most generously invited us to be their guests for a few days.

Mount Omberg, a thickly wooded prominence 262 metres above sea level and rising abruptly in precipices and caverns between the large fertile plains of Östergötland and Lake Vättern, is redolent of immense age, of those endless savannahs of pre-history, the contemplation of which, like the infinite distances between the stars, leave our finite imaginations numb, stunned and ultimately concussed by the realisation that time, as George Santayana has said, is in fact Eternity. From the skulls of the Java man, the Peking man, and the comparatively cultured Piltdown man, the deduction is drawn by anthropologists that man has existed on this planet for at least twenty million years.

<sup>1</sup> *The Revelations of St. Bridget* (Thos. Richardson & Son; 1873).

No evidence has been forthcoming that Östrogothia, which grows rye, wheat and beets and has many large and small saw-mills and wood-pulp and paper-mills, was inhabited so long ago, although the proud boast of the Östergötlanders: "I am born in Östergötland, thank God," might lead one to suppose a unique ancestry. But it is not difficult from the summit of Mount Omberg with its magnificent views over the ancient plains in all directions, to visualise there the flight of the *Aeopteryx*, the first form of bird life, which, according to the description beneath the fossil on display in the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, lived no less than a hundred and fifty million years ago!—had one not remembered that Sweden right down to the Baltic was then in the grip of the Great Ice Age.

Within a stone's-throw of the Mount Omberg hotel are two other objects of later interest, although separate in age and significance by fifteen hundred years, both on the shores of Vättern. Across rolling fields, springing then with young corn, stands the walled grave of King Sverker, who ruled here over the Svear and was murdered in these very fields by ambitious rivals (peasants will point out the exact spot and describe how the attack was made from ambush), shortly after he had arranged the baptism of his ninety-year-old father, who caught cold and died. The second is the home of the late Ellen Key, the pleasant lakeside residence she built here for her retirement because the situation reminded her of Amalfi and Italian Mediterranean towns beloved of her youth.

Her library is preserved on shelves behind wire netting but without glass, and on a small table in the drawing-room lay a copy of Edward Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age* and a framed snapshot of that magnificent-looking type, that apostle of the sacredness of sex, the late Havelock Ellis, taking tea with his wife in the garden of Orchard Farm at West Drayton, which I pass most Sunday mornings on my way from Iver to hear Mass at the church of St. Catherine of Siena at West Drayton.

To Ellen Key, of course, is attributed the doctrine of Free Love, of the unfettered exercise between freely chosen partners (she was writing about Sweden, where men often look like

Greek gods, and women like goddesses)—of that supreme experience of primeval energy and delight, that holy act of cosmic ecstasy and worship which is to-day so debased in meaning and so vulgarised in human thought that the very possession and realisation of sex has become a self-conscious horror and life-long cross to half of mankind, as the case-books of nerve specialists and psychiatrists reveal. (It is impossible, for instance, to travel with observant eyes about England, without reaching the conclusion that at least half the population is suffering from more or less severe forms of sex repression.)

That Ellen Key's writings on the subject of love have had some influence on social life in Sweden cannot be doubted; but in any case the healthy-minded, healthy-living Nordic people, who still breathe air "pure and undefiled", have never subscribed to the Manichean heresy of the intrinsic evil of the flesh and its vaulting desires; and among the peasantry, as she remarks, the lyrical expression of sex has always been a matter of free choice, and individual delight in a poetic land of prodigal nature, of music, dance and song. It was her suggestion that this lyrical freedom might extend one day to the middle and upper classes that brought down on her head the denunciations and heavy thunder of moralists and the unco guid, although I believe she is not so decried among them in these days.

The teachings of the church on this matter are, in very truth, strict enough; yet it is as incontrovertible to-day as with our first parents that *love* (I am not talking of *lust*) knows no morality, as it recognises no laws restrictive of its own eternal ones. And are not malice, slander, greed, unkindness and all uncharitableness far more in direct opposition to the Christian doctrine of love than the spontaneous yielding to lyrical passion, to the beauty and poetry of the cosmic song in the blood and nerves and sinews of two beings drawn into each other's arms by love's unconquerable demands? What!—may I not admire and rejoice in the creature, in the entrancing beauty of a young woman's breasts, and her white, Venus-like flanks, which in Greek times were as much a cause for feminine pride as beauty of feature—and at the same time worship the Creator, and believe in the Death, Passion

and Resurrection of our dear Lord Jesus Christ? As well forbid the movement of my heart when Chopin is played, or the shaking of my soul by Beethoven, and Sibelius, and Tschaiakovsky, and by Dvorak's glorious New World Symphony. And can anyone produce sane reason why the stamen of the passion-flower is a botanical delight, and the stamen of the human male (even the lovely female rose of sex), a subject for vulgar jokings, obscene inscriptions (but not, thank God, in Sweden, nor in Spain), and idiotic taboos?<sup>1</sup> Those who seek, like Heloise and Abelard, joy, mutual rapture and delight in the beauty and wonder of their bodies are surely erring, at least, in the right, instead of in the wrong direction. And I wager that that undimmed, undim-mable Sun of Everlasting Love which is God regards them with less repugnance and ire than He does torturers, usurers, slanderers, and oppressors of poets and other poor people, not to utter the unutterable—*gas-chambers, concentration camps; the holocausts of Coventry, Dresden, Hiroshima!*

*"She is forgiven much because she loved much."*

Alas, golden lads and girls all must, like chimney sweepers, come to dust. O creatures of loveliness and light, you will be a long time dust. Who shall then gather the pale pomegranates of your breasts, or admire your slender bodies, white, dazzling and terribly beautiful as Congo ivory or Egyptian alabaster! . . .<sup>2</sup>

Some Roman families kept, among their *lares and penates*, a figure of the god Priapus, but it must be admitted that the representation preserved in the House of the Vettii at Pompeii is not aesthetically prepossessing, and ladies were not allowed in the "shrine" when I was last in that dead Roman city wrested after two thousand years from the Vesuvian ashes. The ancient Greeks knew neither shame nor self-consciousness about the matter at all. Indeed, with them the phallus was a recognised symbol of joy at the Bacchic festivals of Dionysius, and the "badge of office",

<sup>1</sup> "The only felicity permitted to human life we clog with tedious circumstances and barbarous formality." Jonathan Swift (Letter to "Varina"), who was a Dean of the Church!

<sup>2</sup> "Anyone brought up among Puritans knew that sex was sin. In any previous age sex was strength . . . the greatest and most mysterious of all energies." *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 384.

so to speak, of its priests, the bases of whose busts in the National Museum at Athens display the symbol unabashedly. But it is in the astounding Hypostyle Hall at "Hundred-gated" Karnak, seen and described by Herodotus, and in the Ramasseum on the opposite bank of the Nile at Thebes, that the emblem of fertility, of the universal life-force, finds its boldest and most unequivocal expression, in the over life-size reliefs of the Egyptian deity Amon-Ra which adorn the three hundred massive pillars which still place this awe-inspiring structure among the wonders of the world.

Human susceptibilities being what they are in these wish-watery days, it is rare indeed to find in the art of any country such realism (although it is found in the Cerne Giant, in Dorset, and as a symbol among the Oubangi tribes in French Equatorial Africa)—but in the allegorical panel executed in many-hued marbles by the Danish sculptor Willumson in the State Museum at Copenhagen life-size figures in bronze form part of the *ensemble* in which there is no shrinking from the true implications of natural love. Through the room where this sculptural masterpiece is exhibited men and women, boys and girls pass all day long; and as I sat in speechless wonder before it during a visit to Denmark in 1946 I observed no lowering of the eyes and no blush suffuse any cheek, nor any sign of repugnance at the group's epic verisimilitude, though Evelyn Waugh declared in *Politiken* in 1948 that he considered the masterpiece "Teutonic" in spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Give me any day the Priapus of Pompeii, the phallic emblems of the Athens' statues, the stark realism at Karnak, and Willumson's stupendous *opus*, rather than all the inhibited and repressed ravings which deface the walls of English—or British—public conveniences (I cannot speak for Scotland and Wales).

From Mount Omberg we went on to Gränna, a pretty little

<sup>1</sup> "What D. H. Lawrence means by *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is that the idea of sex, and the whole strong vital instinct, being considered indecent causes men to lose what might be their vital strength and pride of life—their integrity. Conversely, the idea of 'genitals being beauty' in the Blakeian sense would free humanity from its lowering and disintegrating immorality (printed *immortality*!) of deed and thought." *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*. No. 411 to Henry Williamson, dated 25.3.30.

place on the lakeside and now a National Preserve famous for succulent pears, and with a parent-tree still bearing after three hundred years. At Gränna is the birthplace, now a museum, of the explorer André, the prints of whose last Arctic photographs were developed thirty years after they were taken as the result of a chance discovery of his ill-fated camp on the polar ice-cap by a Russian trading ship. Here, too, on the delightful estate of Ribbagården, converted into a kind of country club, we were hospitably entertained in his ancestral home by the owner, the Baron von Dueben, with his kindly English-born Baroness, and were driven by the former up the sheer face of a mountain in his car to inspect his remote chalet (which was decorated in a Rabelaisian kind of way), but preferred to return on foot, although the descent through a forest and along the roughest kind of mountain track made us late for dinner.

Evening brought a visit with good Mr. Björlingson, the post-master of Jönköping, to the famous hostelry of Gyllene Uttern, "Golden Otter", built on a prominence affording magnificent views over Vättern, where rich living and the accessibility of every luxury and comfort does not necessarily preclude high thinking; and in the morning a small steamer took us across to the fabulous island of Visingsö across a blue lake, clear and transparent as crystal, but where storms can rise quickly in autumn, lashing the waves to fury so that quite large vessels are sometimes overwhelmed and founder with all hands. In this lake types of fish-life thrive whose only counterparts to-day are met with in the Arctic Circle.

Visingsö was a favourite rendezvous for pre-historic man, who has left many big barrows four thousand years old scattered over the island. Three centuries ago it was a stronghold of one of the most brilliant and powerful noblemen in Swedish history, Count Per Brahe, who built here the imposing Visingborgs castle, which, however, was burnt out in 1718 and now presents to the approaching visitor nought but an empty and melancholy shell. Ranged in line just beyond the landing-stage were open, plush-seated, facing-both-ways carriages, exactly like the Irish jaunting cars, for conveying passengers to their destinations.

The old and characteristic churches on Visingsö with their tapering wooden belfries separate from the church buildings themselves (so that an alarm could be given from without during service) and walls painted with naïve biblical pictures, are a delight, and as distinctive in architecture as those of Gotland, or the Abadite mosques on the isle of Djerba. In Brahe church, reflecting the influence and culture of the Swedish nobility when Sweden was at its zenith, is the mortuary chapel of the Brahe family and the bridal crown of Ebba Brahe, whom Gustavus Adolphus loved in his youth, and which is still worn on their own wedding-days by the island brides.

On Visingsö the illusion of time no longer deceives; this island is so old, has nourished and sheltered for so long the race of man, "the ape with a soul", that time can no longer "cheat so well, deceiving elf". Here we are, in fact, cheated out of thought, and life assumes its proper perspective with "deserts of vast eternity" for background . . . .

The renowned town of Jönköping, centre of the Swedish safety-match industry, lies at the northern extremity of Vättern, with the celebrated small arms factory, Huskvarna Vapenfabrik, only a few miles round the shore. In the hotel bedroom were push-bells to summon chambermaid, valet, or boot-boy, with natty little depictions of each alongside, so that one need not mistake the right bell. Poor Mr. Björklingson, a noted amateur photographer not only in Sweden but outside it, had a bad foot and was lame, but nevertheless insisted on taking us up to lunch to the summer restaurant of Alphyddan, where beautiful views are obtained of the town, and afterwards for a stroll in the town park, where he smilingly asked to be left on a shady seat resting the offending limb.

Smartly dressed University students who had just materialised were parading the narrow streets singing and carrying banners: and successful girl graduates wearing their dinky white peaked caps were seized by four or five huskies and swung into the air with shoeless feet, their nylon-stockinged legs outlined against the blue blue sky, in celebration of the happy issue (as they fondly imagined, poor dears) out of all their academic afflictions.



## IN ÖSTERGÖTLAND

When we boarded the little Vättern steamer on our way back to Vadstena via the "out-back" township of Hjo—also on the lake-side—the handsome lad who brought the bags down to the quay literally bowed to the ground in refusing a tip, until his corn-coloured hair swept the dust.

I felt like Ashurbanipal receiving the homage of a Hittite captive!

CHAPTER XVI  
EASTWARD FROM VADSTENA

*Sing of Sweden's heart and mind,  
Aiding, heartening all mankind.*

CHARLES WHARTON STORK, *A Song to Heidenstam*

AFTER THIS MEMORABLE WEEK in the ancient province of Östergöthia, we continued our journey in another steamer through the last stretches of the Göta Canal to the Baltic and on to Stockholm.

Leaving reluctantly the architectural, historic and natural jewel of Vadstena behind us, with the finest renaissance castle in Sweden, built by Gustavus Vasa himself (with the use, it must be sorrowfully confessed, of the stones from St. Bridget's own convent) for the entertainment of his first wife, Katherine Stenbock (what a number of similitudes there are, to be sure, in the lives of Gustavus Vasa and our Henry VIII, for both kings were apostles of the Reformation, lusty livers, and looked somewhat alike!)—we turned our eyes once more over the wide and cobalt waters of Lake Vättern, and in about an hour and a half had reached Motala, a picturesque town with delightful shady walks alongside the shores of the canal. Here, where the east section of the canal begins, on the site of a former heathen temple of sacrifice, stands to-day one of the most important machine works in the country. And at an attractive spot in the park nearby is the grave of the principal engineer of the Göta Canal, Baron Baltzar von Platen.

Long before the steamer reached the five Borensult locks, with their fine view over Lake Boren, I had been conscious of what can only be described as a "Bridgettine" aura over sky, lake and shore; and soon after leaving the locks, near to the eastern side of Vättern, we came in sight of Ulfåsa Manor itself, set amid gentle woods, where the Saint lived after her marriage on property belonging to the Royal Folkungar family, for she

was related to King Magnus, over whom, indeed, she exercised a psychic influence.

Ulfåsa, lovely spot, soon faded from sight as the steamer glided across the smaller Boren lake to the Borensberg lock, where we entered the canal again and found ourselves amid idyllic pastoral scenery—although, if I remember aright, it was past midnight to be sure. After more swan-like glidings through meadows and woods in a magical luminous light of gold and blue, we reached Lake Roxen at Berg, where the amazing “stairs” of seven consecutive locks in themselves substantiate the claim of a nineteenth-century traveller who, writing in the old *Edinburgh Review* roundly declared that the Göta Canal “as a piece of engineering is a long way ahead of the Suez Canal”.

The brief summer night fell upon a hushed world as we left the steamer, which at Berg takes nearly two hours to descend the locks to Lake Roxen, and in a mauve and purple air, with all sounds muffled, even the twitterings of the birds, walked from the canal across fields and through a narrow country lane to another haunt of peace, the thirteenth-century Vreta Klosterkyrka, or Abbey Church of Vreta, a Cistercian nunnery in 1162, and reconsecrated as an Abbey Church in the presence of King Magnus and his Queen on June 13, 1289.<sup>1</sup>

That eminent authority on Oriental glass, and particularly on medieval Oriental glass discovered in Sweden, Dr. Carl Johan Lamm, formerly Lecturer at the Egyptian University in Cairo and my friend of Egypt days, writes in one of his many erudite monographs on the subject that a considerable quantity of Syro-Frankish glass has been found at Vreta, some of it, it is reasonable to suppose, having been used in the great Royal banquet which followed the consecration of the church. This glass is of a later date than the often, alas, fragmentary Persian, Egyptian and

<sup>1</sup> “Anno domini 1289 ibidus Junii dedicata et consecrata est ecclesia sancti moniatum Vretis per venerabilem in Christi patrem domum Benedictum secundum presente domino Magno Sweorum Gotorumque rege ac domina Helewick regina in honorem de omnipotentis ac gloriose virginis Marie. Eodem tempore domina Katerina, secunda proxima die festum dedicationes precedente consecrata est in abbatissam ibidem, altis decem virginibus eciam eodem tempore solleniter deo dedicatis et introductis ac consecratis.” “Magno Sweorum Gotorumque”: what a magnificent mouthful!

Frankish glass unearthed at Birka, to which I have already referred, the commercial centre of the kingdom of the Svear during the Viking Age, or of that flawless ninth-century cup of Iraqi or Persian manufacture, which, says Dr. Lamm, constitutes "the only complete glass vessel of Islamic origin that has so far been found in Scandinavia".<sup>1</sup>

Vreta Klosterkyrka, whose low, sweeping arches, massive pillars, rose windows and low stone benches, we inspected by the light of a single candle, contains a large number of tombs and memorial tablets, including those commemorative of the contribution made to Swedish public life and military history by many famous Scottish families, several ennobled scions of which are buried here.

It is of special interest to note the exploits of the Scots during the Thirty Years' War. In one year some twenty thousand were levied for service under the Swedish sovereigns. In 1630 the Scots united to form the famous Green Brigade, commanded by Sir John Hepburn, whom Louis XIV called "the best soldier in Christendom". Many prominent Englishmen and Scotsmen were serving Sweden at this time, such as Alexander Leslie, Sir Patric Ruthven, Sir James Turner, General James King, Sir James Hamilton, and later on, Field Marshal Robert Douglas, General Rogert Lichton, William Bennet, Hugo Hamilton, who all saw service in the army, and Stewart Klerck, Forth, Spalding in the navy, while among men of learning may be remembered Murray, Guthrie, Strang, Eyre, Leyer and many others.

And in case it should be thought that this survey also is all my own work, I hereby confess that I have taken the entire paragraph, lock, stock and barrel, from the excellent Traffic

<sup>1</sup> The taste for Oriental glass was fully possessed by the globe-trotting Emperor Hadrian, whose "Vale of Tempe", hewn out of the Alban hills by hundreds of slaves in the gardens of his villa above Rome after his return from Greece, is a sight even in these days to marvel at. Dr. Lamm quotes a delightful letter from the Emperor written from his Egyptian capital of Alexandria in A.D. 130, describing Egyptian glassworks and other factories: "I am sending you three calices *allassontes versicolores*, which the priest of the temple presented to me as a special gift for you and your sister, and I should like you to have them on your table at special entertainments. But mind that young Africanus does not handle them carelessly."

Association pamphlet "Sweden" to which I have previously referred. After which handsome admission there is little need to place the quotation within inverted commas. . . .

The steamer completed its descent of the series of seven locks, and in the gathering dusk we pushed out into Lake Roxen, which has a length of 17 miles, with a steep north shore with wood-covered rocks, but on the south of the lake stretches a wide and fertile plain. Nearby are a number of castles and ruins of some historic importance.

The brief veil of night fell and we slept for a few hours, only to be awakened by the rattling of chains and a sound as though the sides of the steamer were being squeezed between two contracting stone walls. At three in the morning I was back on the observation deck to view the passing scenery. We were gliding through green and rolling pasture-land, relieved by an occasional farm or cottage discovered in a belt of trees by the canal bank.

And this seems to be the appropriate place to refer to the uniform use as preservative paint on the country *stuga* and large and small farmhouses throughout the land of Sweden of the red ochre from the copper mines of Falun, "which," says Miss Maxwell Fraser in her excellent and exhaustively informative guide-book on Sweden *In Praise of Sweden* (3rd edition, Methuen), "forms now so characteristic and so much a part of Swedish scenery that it is bound up with every memory of the country".

The story goes that the properties of red ochre as an excellent preservative stain for the wooden walls of Swedish homes was first discovered some three centuries ago as the result of a goat rubbing against a copper mine dump in Dalecarlia, and then, looking as though he had been dipped in red ink, against a farmstead.

This incident has a most interesting historical parallel in the True Story of the Golden Fleece. For, in the Golden Chersonese to which Jason and the Argonauts sailed on their famous quest—the Soviet Georgia of to-day—the streams which ultimately feed the rivers are exceedingly swift owing to the mountainous terrain. There the gold is washed down in the form of alluvial gold,

and when the streams arrive at one of the quiet reaches above the numerous natural weirs, the gold is deposited on the bed of the stream. "The natives take advantage of this fact" (wrote a correspondent who had lived in Georgia during the late war, in *Hellas*, the Greek National Weekly, now unhappily defunct), "so one old man told me to peg the skin of a sheep on the bed of the stream: a large proportion of the gold settles on to one or more of the skins and is held by the oily, greasy wool. After a period of three or four years, the skins are raised to the surface and are literally Golden Fleeces from the amount of gold that has settled and clung to them in that time."

And thus we have at last the solution to the mystery of the Golden Fleece, which has puzzled scholars from the days of Strabo.

On the more ancient timber buildings in Sweden, of a fashioning and design which are quite unattainable to-day, the red-ochre coat has mellowed into a glorious dark maroon red which fills the eye with colour and bravely sets off the brighter red of the clusters of wild strawberries that grow in profusion along the more lonely country roads in Värmland and Dalarna.

At Vänneberga the canal lay far above the surrounding country; and in the idyllic town of Söderköping, one of the oldest towns in Sweden, the canal made a fine sweep past a thick fringe of ash trees and silver birches, and soon we seemed to be running dangerously near a huge mass of primeval rock, the Ramunderberget, near the north shore. But a hand's turn at the wheel adroitly averted a collision. Soon we were through the last lock at Mem, where the canal loses itself in the Slätbaken, a long bay of the Baltic, and passing the ruins of Stegeborg castle, one of the principal medieval fortresses of Sweden.

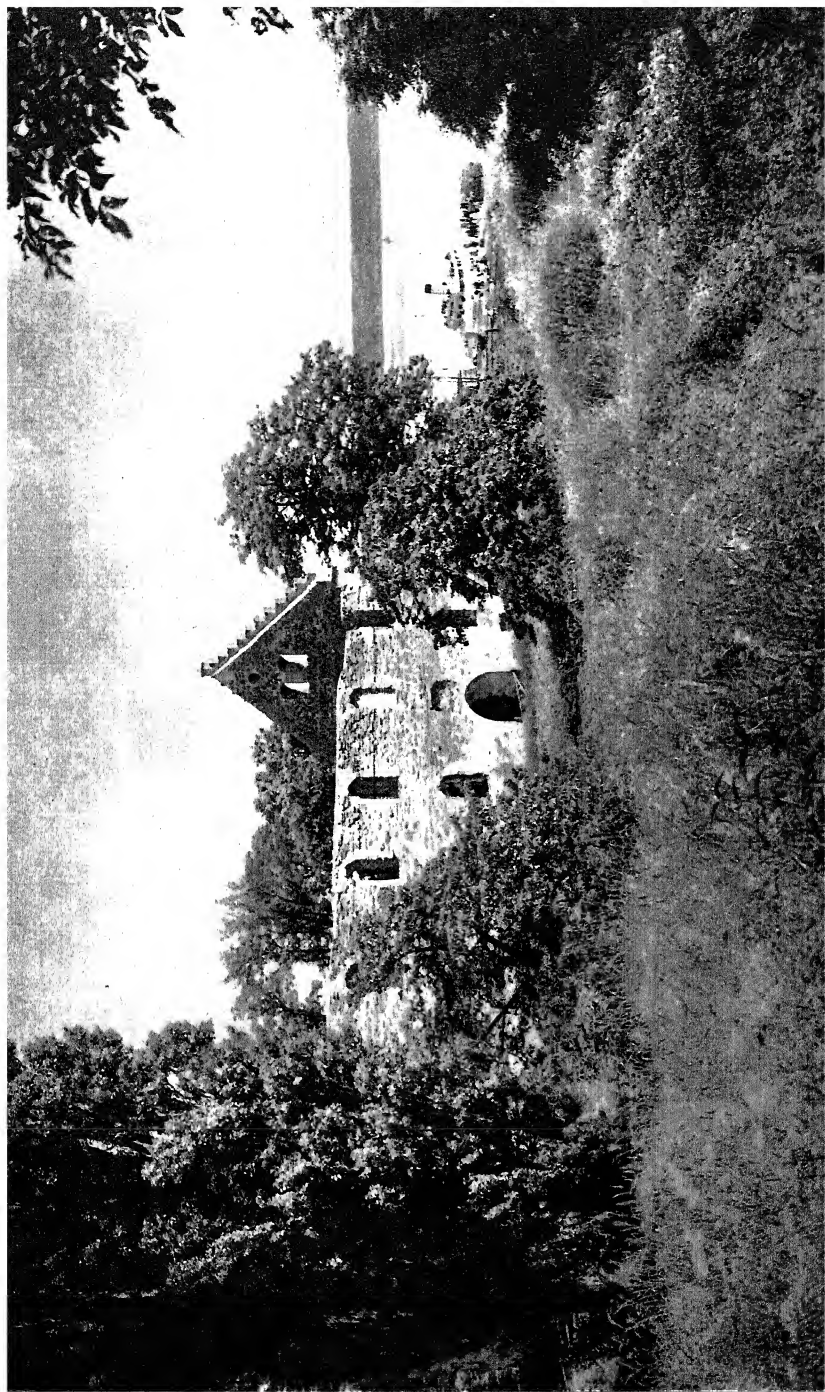
The Baltic swell tossed the little steamer from port to starboard, while the salt sea winds brought a renewed sense of well-being and high adventure. Now we were into the archipelago of large and small islands which are known far and wide as the skerries, the *Skärgård*, where thousands of Stockholm families have their summer homes. A yacht swooped by, its tall white sail bellowing magnificently in the strong breeze, herald of the great fleet of

racing and pleasure yachts which ply this coast from June to September. Flocks of white gulls wheeled and screamed in the wake of our steamer, alighting delicately on the waves, or coming to rest on the narrow shore of some lonely islet.

The boat now steered right out into the open sea, passing Oxelösund, port and shipping place for large quantities of ore from the Bergslagera, with which it is connected by rail. Then along the bay of Himmerljärden ("Bay of Heaven"), with its beautiful shores rich with vegetation, into the Södertälje Canal, and through the lock, the very last in the long inland voyage from Gothenburg, into historic lake Mälaren itself, third largest of the Swedish lakes and scene, on the green island of Birka, which now loomed into view, of the very earliest Christian missionary foundation in Sweden, in the eighth century. On the quay at Södertälje boys were crying: "Pretzel!—Pretzel!" holding out bags of the famous 'snake' biscuits.

What a thrill was that approach to Stockholm, after such a journey, and during two hours' steaming across the beautiful wide gleaming waters of Mälaren, surrounded by those green forests in which the wild elk still roam! Above a long and stately colonnade rose a massive pile of red brick, surmounted by a soaring square tower and a conspicuous lantern, topped by a flashing golden pinnacle, and at the very summit the three golden crowns of Sweden. It was Stockholm's Town Hall—acknowledged masterpiece of modern European architecture, and goal of this ever memorable island voyage through the green and fertile heart of Sweden, my springtime land!

It was June 1938. We descended the tiny gangway on to the Riddarholms Quay, in old Stockholm, below the palatial building of the royal publishers, Norstedt's, publishers of Prince Wilhelm and the late Count Folke Bernadotte. . . .







# SÖDERMANLAND

## CHAPTER XVII

### STOCKHOLM IDYLL

*The only good is to love; the only truth is to suffer.*

ALFRED DE MUSSET

IT WAS JUNE 1946. I was seated beneath a burgeoning white lilac tree overlooking the shimmering waters of the Djurgårdsbrunnsviken, in that magnificent natural park in which the open-air historical museum and folk school of Skansen is situated and on that large and lovely lake-side which can be reached on foot from the heart of Stockholm in half an hour, or less by a fast walker.

Birds sang lyrically; late sunlight dappled the leaves of innumerable trees and wide, grass-grown slopes; agile young riders of both sexes wearing open shirts and breeches or jodhpurs galloped merrily past along Djurgården's "Rotten Row" (for it is Stockholm's Hyde Park); well-dressed pedestrians, with bronzed complexions glowing with health, walked through leafy glades and narrow footpaths in pairs seeking quiet seats under the massive chestnut trees or under burgeoning lilacs where they might discuss the profounder mysteries of Swedenborg below Rosendals slott, the simple "suburban" home where Marshal Bernadotte had lived after his arrival in Stockholm to take up the throne of Gustavus Vasa as King Carl XIV Johan at the Riksdag's invitation.

"O Fröken—*Jag Älskar Dig!*"<sup>1</sup>

My companion turned her head to glance at them, murmuring something in Swedish which I imagined so signify, Stuff and Nonsense. Then, returning her gaze to the *vik*, whose waters were now reflecting the prolonged glow of the northern sunset, she said in English, after a pause: "But how can you know?"

<sup>1</sup> "I love thee."

*Alvastra*: Ruins of the Cistercian monastery founded by twelfth-century monks from Clairvaux; here the Prince of Nericia, St. Birgitta's husband, died in 1383.

You've only seen me twice, when you had tea with us in the office, and yesterday when you typed your Congress message for *The Times*."

"Nevertheless, Fröken, I do indeed at this moment love you. For as one of your own poets has said, to wit Gunnar Ollén in his Introduction to *The Road to Damascus*, published in an English translation in 1939 for the Anglo-Swedish Foundation from part of Mr. Bernard Shaw's Nobel Prize money (for Shaw is so rolling in royalties that he did not need a penny of the Prize): 'Strindberg was an artist and as such a man of impulse, with the spontaneity and naïvety and intensity of a child. For him love had nothing to do with respectability and worldly calculations; he liked to think of it as a thunderbolt striking mortals with a destructive force like the lightning hurled by the almighty Zeus'. . . At this moment, Fröken, when I look at your wavy golden hair and large blue eyes, I am like Strindberg—after he had been hit by the thunderbolt."

"But you are married?"

"Certainly; but I have a gentleman's agreement with my wife that I may admire beautiful ladies as part of the raw material for my books when I am abroad, provided I do not praise them to her face when I am at home."

"Well, I think married men should admire only their wives. Married men at the office are always pausing at my desk when I am busy to say that they are not understood by their wives, and will I please take an interest in them. You are married and therefore you must not say such things."

"But just supposing, for the sake of argument, that I cannot help it, Fröken: because you are so nice and so pretty, if a little plump as you said, and because you have a rose-like complexion and eyes clear as the blue sky. I am a man for whom the visible world exists. If married Englishmen may not admire Swedish girls, then I suggest that your Government should have this notice printed and displayed prominently on the quayside at Gothenburg and in the Customs shed at Bromma airport (on page 131).

If your Government is unwilling to enact such a sensational measure, then the only other solution I can think of is for Swedish women *en masse* to petition the King to quarantine such married

## WARNING TO ALL MARRIED ALIENS VISITING SWEDEN

It is hereby notified that all married aliens (and especially those of British nationality) found wandering about Sweden admiring ladies who are not their wives will be summarily shot. This order shall not apply during the close elk-hunting season, when such delinquents are to be held at His Royal Majesty's pleasure in the dungeons of Gripsholm Castle, or in solitary confinement in one of the 250 rooms of Skokloster.

By Order of the Riksdag

### *BY FURTHER ORDER OF THE RIKSDAG*

Such pleas, however persuasively or eloquently presented, as: 'I did not ask to be born', 'Well, she was so lovely'; 'Honestly, I could not help it', or 'Then in future see that your womenfolk are not so confoundedly elegant', are declared inadmissible and will be rejected by the royal foresters.

In certain defined cases, however, where a precise undertaking is given by the delinquent in the presence of available witnesses never to admire a Swedish lady again, there may be some mitigation of the penalty upon consultation by telephone with the Minister for External Affairs—but take due heed of the fact that no reliability can be placed on any such undertakings from poets.

aliens travelling without their wives on an uninhabited island in the Stockholm skärgård:

Where nothing but the waves, and I  
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep:  
There let me live and die."

"Who wrote that?"

"George Gordon, Lord Byron, who so far as can be ascertained from the discovered data had about a hundred and fifty love affairs during his wander-years in Europe and Asia Minor, not to mention escapades in England before he was driven out by the Augusta scandal. How he achieved all this in addition to marriage in such a comparatively short life I for one have never rightly

comprehended; but it is a fact that he is regarded as almost more than mortal in Greece, where he would have been made king or first president of the Hellenes after the Battle of Navarino if he had survived the fever-ridden swamps of Missolonghi, and as a hero by otherwise puritanical spinsters, many of whom would give their ears to have been his mistress."<sup>1</sup>

My companion, who had been listening attentively to my meanderings while attempting to drive off hordes of voracious mosquitoes, now turned her large and candid eyes upon me and remarked: "But I thought the English were cold people?"

"I was speaking of Byron," I said. "Certainly, the English like other peoples to think they are; and it is true they are mortally terrified at appearing human,<sup>2</sup> and therefore burn and yearn in secret. But *I* think it better to admire than to burn."

"Well, Swedish girls are cold."

"Fiddlesticks! Tell that to the marines."

"I have not heard those words before. Let me find them." And she took a tiny red Hugo dictionary from her neat handbag.

"Oh, they are terms we use to indicate that we don't quite believe a statement." . . .

"Sex," suddenly declared my 24-year-old companion, with supreme naturalness, "is no longer a problem with us."

The devil it isn't, I thought. . . . "In Stockholm, d'you mean?"

"In Sweden," she continued, haughtily ignoring my enquiry, "we have got *beyond* sex."

"I am very glad to hear it. If only some other peoples I could name would get beyond it perhaps they might become natural and human, and a good deal less frigid, like yo—, I mean, like the Sw——"

<sup>1</sup> It is recounted of the celebrated Countess Guiccoli that when English guests were at her palace in Rome the Count would first lead them proudly to her portrait above the fireplace in the *salon* with the remark: "This is my wife, formerly the mistress of Lord Byron!"

<sup>2</sup> *Overheard in a Reading train in 1947*: Fine-looking elderly Swiss—or Provençal—who has been exchanging views with young lawyer on the differing characteristics of English, American and Continental peoples—"But can you explain this to me, sir: what is the difference between the average Englishman and a human being?" Flight of lawyer, gripping brief-case like a lifebelt, as the train drew into Paddington.

Her innocent sky-blue eyes regarded me unflinchingly.

"Well"—after a pause—"I still think that you should not admire anyone but your wife. . . . You are half feminine."

"True, true. All the poetical and gentle side of me is feminine. And like attracts like. Therefore it is agreed that I cannot avoid turning towards beauty whenever and wherever I find it:

If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

"Who wrote that?"

"Young William Shakespeare—when he was already the husband of Anne Hathaway—to the Dark Lady of the Sonnets. . . . Shakespeare, by the way, is very blunt sometimes, isn't he? It is surprising that the puritans, who are scarce, I believe, in Scandinavia, do not insist on an expurgated Folio. What, for instance, do you make of this line from *Venus and Adonis*:

But he, seeing more wounds than one, blushing fled.

"*Hvad heter det på svenska?*—What would it be in Swedish?"

"I'm afraid I could not say."

"Then I cannot make anything of it; I think Shakespeare is finer in our language. And if you cannot help admiring then I cannot give you any more advice. You must be as good as possible. . . . And now you may drive away the mosquitoes."

And if these were the last words I should ever write, I defy any man, be he saint or be he bishop—and I will go so far as to include theological students, scientists and lecturers in mathematics—married and unmarried—to be confronted with the duty of chasing off hungry mosquitoes from the nylon-encased limbs of a blonde *flicka* from Skåne in the Stockholm twilight and not derive pleasure from the obligation.

The following summer we met again and walked one evening along the opposite shore of the Djurgårdsbrunnsviken, when I said that I would like to record our previous conversation in a book.

"Certainly," she said, pointing out the new headquarters of the Swedish Air Force and other recent buildings in the neighbourhood, "but why don't you come and live here for two years? Then you might understand something about us."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CONGRESS DANCES

*More and more is love venerated as part of Nature's mysticism, whose course no outsider may determine.*

ELLEN KEY, *Love and Marriage*

ON REACHING STOCKHOLM from Åmål I had joined the orderly queue outside the Central Station in Vasagatan, and, after only a brief delay, was presently gliding comfortably through the main thoroughfares of the Capital in one of those elegant American limousines which serve for taxis in the larger Swedish towns, and driven by one of those handsome, upstanding taxi-men who, in Stockholm as in Gothenburg, Malmö and where you will, are the soul of politeness and unobtrusive efficiency.

We stopped outside one of the big blocks of flats in the fashionable Östermalmsgatan, and I shot up with my bags in the house lift to the floor occupied by the cultured lady, daughter of a former director of the National Museum, with whom I had stayed on previous visits before the second World War, when she resided on the Näsby estate some miles outside the city. During the years of war her son, whom I had known in Cairo, had taken up residence on a property of his own; and as her husband, a distinguished art connoisseur and collector, who had filled the Manor with precious books and paintings, glass and statuary, had died, she had moved to town and sold the Näsby estate to the government, which promptly transformed the *slott* (which was designed by Nicodemus Tessin who also designed the Royal Palace in Stockholm), into a college for naval cadets, a Swedish Dartmouth.

The faithful housekeeper whom I remembered from Näsby opened the door and showed me to my room, overlooking gardens and high trees and the broad Sturegatan, and there I found a letter propped against a carafe of water on the silver tray beside my bed:

## CONGRESS DANCES

Dear Mr. Coles!—As I am not at home to welcome You, I'll do it with this card. I had to go to the country for a couple of days, but shall probably return June 1 or 2. My daughter-in-law comes to St'hlm for a Red Cross Congress on the 31. She speaks english, if there is anything You will ask for that the maid doesn't understand. She, the maid, will give you the keys. The smaller one is for the street door—shut after 9 o'cl. The big one is for the door to the flat.—Let the maid show You how to fasten the window with that strange looking steel-thing.—

You can have breakfast "at home". Only tell the maid if you like to have  
KAFFE or TE—Porridge=GRÖT  
CORNFLAKES or a boiled Ä G G.

Can't offer You fried eggs because butter is scarce.—Soap and washing-soap also being scarce, we can't help You with the laundry and I know it is rather difficult to have it done.

I hope the weather will be as wonderful during the congress as it is to day.  
*Mycket välkommen till Stockholm.*

One memorable afternoon we strolled with Prince Wilhelm<sup>1</sup> through the State galleries of the Royal Palace, and His Royal Highness introduced me to the Crown Princess Louise, whose portrait I used to see in the office of the then Director of the Rotorua Spa, in far New Zealand—a former Medical Officer to the Maori Contingent in the 1914–18 War—when taking radium baths and electrical treatment there during the course of wanderings in Australasia between the two World Wars.

"I was interested to hear that you knew Dr. Duncan," she said; "we were great friends in London after the first war. I expect you heard that he died two years ago; his wife wrote

<sup>1</sup> At the Academic graduation-day festivities in Stockholm on May 30th, thirty-four Swedes received their doctor's degree and a further ten an honorary doctor's degree. Among the latter was the Swedish 'Poet Prince' Wilhelm, Duke of Södermanland, and youngest son of the Swedish King, who was created an honorary doctor in the faculty of Philosophy. King Gustaf, the Crown Prince, the Crown Princess and other members of the Royal Family honoured the festival with their presence.

"Prince Wilhelm is a much-appreciated author, who has, among other things, written poetry, books of travel and big game hunting and an interesting book about Sweden, which has lately been translated into English (*This Land of Sweden*). He has also gained fame as a short-film producer, having produced a series of artistic short films about Swedish scenery and the life of the Swedish rural population." *The Anglo-Swedish Review*, July 1948.



to me that he should have retired, but stayed on because of the emergency . . .”

We were surrounded by noted writers from many lands, all sipping tea from elegant china and demolishing the King's rich cream cakes, and sustained conversation was difficult. But in that kindly presence, and over the heads of the lively chattering international throng, I seemed to see once more the summer bungalow of our mutual friend on the sandy foreshore at Maunganui, in the Bay of Plenty, as I had last seen it one night of the Southern summer, from the deck of the Auckland steamer, with blinds undrawn and lamps glowing in the window to bid good fortune to the lone wanderer.

(Years later, that good fortune had summoned me one morning to Buckingham Palace, where, in private audience, another Royal Princess had spoken of places in Greece we both knew as she turned over the pages of my new “travel-memorials”, *Cities of Troy*, which she had read in manuscript . . .)

Before the Congress closed I met Prince Wilhelm at a private dinner-party in Laboriegatan given by the managing director of Norstedt, publishers, which had issued his notable book, *This Land of Sweden*, and his charming Baroness-wife, Lady-in-Waiting to Princess Sybilla, whose husband, Prince Gustaf Adolf, was killed in a tragic air accident at Copenhagen the following year. Dr. Henry Goddard Leach was there, too, of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and Arnulf Överlund, Norway's greatest modern poet, who bore in his broken frame and noble features seared with suffering the indelible marks of war years passed in a concentration camp.

Other authors of fame and promise, and distinguished Swedish men and women writers, made up the fifty or sixty guests, who all stood in a circle round the drawing-room while H.R.H. was introduced to each one individually. After *caviare* and sherry we all moved into the spacious dining-room overlooking the *vik* and Skansen.

I had been allotted a place of honour beside the daughter of the house, soon to be married in the English Church in Stockholm to a *Freiherr* Captain of the King's Body Guard who bore a purely

## CONGRESS DANCES

English surname; but a Hungarian poet, who thought that punctuality in Stockholm was of as little account as in post-war Budapest, was late, and so my place had to be kept in reserve against his arrival.

I sat instead at a round table beside the wife of the King's physician, who admired greatly England's war effort and seemed anxious that I should appreciate where Sweden's true sympathies had always lain, and all that Sweden had done towards the alleviation of distress in Europe—which I was more than willing to do, for the *Real Tesoro*, *Castel Blanc* and *Bichot Monopole* wines induced geniality and confraternity.

"We have a summer home out in the Skerries," she told me, "where a Dutch refugee boy stayed with us for four months. One day our maid came running down to the cove where we had just returned in our motor-boat to say that King Gustaf wished to consult my husband about a slight influenza cold he had contracted and which he was afraid would interfere with his shooting the next morning. She was tremendously excited, and kept repeating: 'Madam, it was the King himself who spoke to me!'"

I kept the menu of that memorable dinner-party—

*Canapés Lucullus*  
*Crème de Morilles*  
*Filets de Sole au Chablis*  
*Pommes nouvelles*  
*Bécasse et Mousseline de Gibier*  
*Salade de saison*  
*Fraises et Ananas en Gelée du vin*  
*Florentines*

As we smoked cigarettes or cigars and sipped our coffee and liqueurs the King's physician, who was seated at another round table nearby, produced a guitar and sang to his own accompaniment in a clear and sonorous baritone a song of Bellman's, the greatest Swedish lyricist, the "Swedish Burns". Then a professional singer appeared, a guitar slung across his broad shoulders, and sang a neat ballad with words by the "poet Prince" followed by the stirring and popular "Balladen om franska kungens

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spelmän" song by Frans G. Bengtsson, with music by Per Martin Hamberg:

"Vi har kommit från Burgund och från Guienne  
från Brabant och från det gröna Normandie.  
Vi ha aldrig sett de länderna igen,  
sen vi trummade för Kungens kompani.  
Högt där Alpen lyfter kammen  
klang det: Korn.  
Med kung Karl och Oriflammen  
emot Rom.—  
Och den blåa luften bar  
våra vimplar och standar  
tills av liljorna Toscana stod i blom."

Later Dr. Leach, in an affecting little speech, expressed to the distinguished Baroness hostess the delight and thanks of all her guests for the evening's unforgettable hospitality, "in the dear intimacy of a Swedish home". . . .

Outside on the terrace the still waters of the Djurgårdsbrunnsviken reflected the bright illuminations from the open french windows, as I quoted for the benefit of the eldest daughter of the house a passage from the Letters of Keats: "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination." . . . "Send them to me," she had said.

On the following evening a Supper was given by the Stockholm Municipality to four hundred and fifty guests in the Golden Chamber of the Town Hall, with its vast mock Byzantine mosaics, a grandiose echo of Santa Sophia, Ravenna and Monreale; and afterwards we danced until midnight in the Italianate courtyard.

And one evening there was a State performance of Moussorgsky's mighty opera "Howantschina", at the Royal Opera House ("I was never so bored in my life," genially remarked "Pewe" to an Australian writer of popular novels at the buffet supper which followed).

## CHAPTER XIX

### "LAST, LONELIEST, LOVELIEST . . ."

*I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.*

WALT WHITMAN

THE SECRET OF STOCKHOLM'S fascination lies for me in the fact that there, as at Sydney, which it forcibly recalls to those who know Australia, is one of the world's great capitals still embosomed in primal Nature.

In other metropolises—at any rate in the larger capital cities of European countries—she has long since been compelled to recede at the inexorable demands of "progress" and "civilisation", so that only the faint echo of her immemorial music may be heard to-day in St. James's Park or the Luxembourg Gardens, in the Tiergarten or the gardens of the Villa Borghese. But at Stockholm Nature has scarcely been disturbed in her ancient haunts. The noble elk still roams in its wild state within an hour or two of the city; and the prehistoric lake, the primeval rock (the oldest rock formation in the world) scarred by the passage of great glaciers, the antediluvian forest, and the unspoiled countryside (occasionally studded with weird and angular runic stones), with the eternal sky overarching all, are virtually the same as when the Suiones, the authentic ancestors of the Swedish race, roamed across these wooded landscapes from one encampment to another six thousand years ago. And it is to the enduring credit of the fellow-countrymen of Linnaeus and Swedenborg that, instead of warring upon Nature, driving her back into park-reserves, or just remaining fatalistic at the unconquerable "jungle-tide" they have made of her an ally: so that it may with truth be said that Stockholm is wedded to Nature as definitely as ever was Venice to the Adriatic by the casting of the Doge's ring from the deck of the *Bucentoro*.

It is this interrelated partnership of created and natural beauty which makes the approach such a memorable experience; for like

Venice and Athens, Stockholm, the "Venice of the North", should be approached first by water, either from the grey-blue stretches of the Baltic, or by the lovely Göta Canal route and through the western waters of Lake Mälaren. The visitor is then rewarded with the unforgettable vision of a noble and elegant city rising gleaming and immaculate from its surrounding waters.

It is, of course, the late Professor Ragnar Östberg's magnificent conception, the Stockholm Stadshus, which immediately rivets the gaze of all travellers arriving at the Swedish capital by the canal route through central Sweden. There this unique building rises beside the Mälär lake; the beautiful tree-lined forecourt diversified with charming statues by one of Sweden's foremost modern sculptors, Carl Eldh; the long, Italianate colonnade; the wide, satisfyingly red-brick façade; and with the massively magnificent square tower of red brick topped by a graceful lantern and Sweden's three shining crowns—all soaring into the broad and cloud-flecked spring sky much as must have done Ptolemy's famous *pharos* at Alexandria. Not so much does the Stockholm Town Hall remind the traveller of Venice, but of San Gemignano. And there are yet other stimulating historical echoes. For tribute has been paid to the past as well as to the more prosaic present, and wherever you look, either within or without, you find something to lift the thought or imagination; some fine example of Swedish art or craftsmanship; for every aspect of the national energy and genius is represented either inside or outside.<sup>1</sup>

There are many other buildings which demonstrate the progressive and corporate aesthetic culture of modern Sweden, such as the new Concert House by the great modern architect Tengbom (flanked by Hötorget, the flower market), with its classic façade, below which the attenuated figures of the Nine Muses on Carl Milles' celebrated Orpheus fountain seem to be rising skywards like a bundle of lit torches; the conspicuous Engelbrekt church

<sup>1</sup> "If any modern building has risen out of the desires and hopes and beliefs of a people, in the sense that a great cathedral represented the aspirations of a particular place and a particular time beautifully and sharply focused, it is Stockholm's Town Hall. The past and the present are fused in it. . . ." *Sweden: The Middle Way*, p. 115.

standing near the Technical High School's spacious halls and lecture-rooms at Östermalm; the stately Law Courts, whose mellow walls are so admirably emphasised by the surrounding trees; the City Library, a striking example of the advanced school of modern Swedish architecture, where two hundred thousand volumes are ranged on open shelves; the noble Opera House in the central Gustavus Adolf's Square with its equestrian statue of the victor of Breitenfeld and Würzburg, Augsburg and Munich; and round the corner, on the Nybroviken waterfront, the Royal Dramatic Theatre where citizens occasionally enjoy the sunshine seated democratically on the theatre steps, as of a Greek temple in the days of Demosthenes.

On the Norrström waterfront, although at the end, beyond several luxurious hotels and the residential quarters of the Swedish Royal Automobile Club, stands the National Museum with its choice collections of representative paintings and *objets d'art* and its famous historical frescoes by the late Carl Larsson; and if the walk—one of the most beautiful in the capital—is continued along the stately waterside avenue of Strandvägen, where are situated many of the embassies and legations, and across the Djurgårdsbron, the huge grey mass looms into view of the Nordiska Museum containing the assembled memorials of the nation's life and history, including a display of armour, rivalling the collections at the Wallace Museum in London and at the Royal Palace in Madrid. Here are also to be seen the characteristic blue and yellow uniform—still spattered with the mud of the battlefield, mud two centuries old!—worn by Charles XII when he was killed by a Norwegian (or Swedish) bullet on a cold November night in 1718 at the siege of Fredrikshald, and the tricorne hat he was wearing cleanly scored through over the left temple; and also the bloodstained shirt, with lace ruff and cuffs, taken from the body of Gustavus Adolphus after his death in battle (also in November) in the misty dawn at Lützen.

At this end of the elongated arcadian island of Djurgården, with its unspoiled pastoral meadows and superb avenues of ancient trees, rises on the crest of a steep slope the capital's chief park and playground, the popular open-air summer resort or “museum” of

Skansen which has several interesting *härbren*, dating from the early Middle Ages. At Skansen on summer evenings a thousand or more citizens sometimes gather to sing hearty Swedish folk-songs under the leadership of an official song-master, while attendants clad in the charming peasant costumes of the various provinces carry round refreshments, or dance folk-measures.

On a neighbouring, thickly wooded slope is the Thiel Gallery, containing a small but excellent collection of Swedish art—exquisite and whimsical paintings by Carl Larsson; marvellous nature studies by Liljefors; Prince Eugen's landscapes—and fine examples of the art of Nils Kreuger, Eugène Jansson—famous for his haunting blue nocturnes—Norström, and Carl Wilhelmson, painters of coastal scenery; and of course of that consummate colourist Anders Zorn, who is represented by no less than 180 works including the complete collection of his etchings (his wonderful study of Renan almost equals the best of Rembrandt's portrait etchings). Moreover, the views of Stockholm afforded by the open, oblong windows of the upper rooms of this delightful art gallery are themselves like a series of superb water-colours.

In another beautiful corner of idyllic Djurgården, with crowded flower-beds running down to the very water's edge, stands Valdemarsudde, the appropriate residence until his death in 1947 at the age of 82 of that great gentleman and royal painter Prince Eugen, brother of the King. In 1936 the artist prince himself showed me his own two favourite canvases at Valdemarsudde, radiant pastoral scenes painted in Skåne which seemed to fill the dining-room with colour and light, and a full-length portrait of his mother, Queen Sophia, by Zorn. At the porch of the royal villa a cast of the Winged Victory of Samothrace seemed about to take off over the blue waters of the Saltsjön! . . .

Stockholm has many fine examples of modern business architecture, representative of which are, for example, "PUB", Paul U. Bergström's modern Department Stores on the west side of the market in Kungsgatan, where Greta Garbo was once an assistant, and the former palatial offices of Kreuger at the Swedish Match Company in Västra Trädgårdsgatan, leading from the

sixteenth-century St. Jakob's Church, in whose delightful cemetery people sit contentedly by the worn tombstones at lunch-time reading poetry and philosophy while they eat their midday sandwiches (“O Death where is thy sting, O Grave thy victory!”); the gigantic Tennis Hall at Alvik, the largest of its kind in Europe; and the towering Nordiska Kompaniet Store, the largest in the country, in the busy Hamngatan, from whose breezy roof-restaurant views are obtained over Stockholm rivalled only by those afforded from the new Västerbron bridge and the Katarinahissen Look-out at Slussen, which is a good place to watch the city's traffic system in effective operation, and where the electric trains leave for Saltsjöbaden. There, too, are situated the headquarters of the extensive Swedish co-operative organisation, Konsum, which is based on the British Rochdale system but in scope goes far beyond it.

All these buildings are inspiring examples of the Swedish principle of combining art and dignity with practicality and utility. . . .

So much for the modern city. What of old Stockholm?

In the venerable Storkyrka (“Great Church”), the oldest church in Stockholm, where the Swedish monarchs are crowned, hangs an eloquent picture of Stockholm as it was when all Europe was awakening under the life-giving influences of the Renaissance. In this historic painting the capital is confined to the “*Staden mellan broarna*” (“The city between the bridges”), now, like the Ile de la Cité in Paris, no more than the historic centre of the city, and the surrounding shores are shown covered by trees or dense vegetation. The tapering spire of the Storkyrka soars above a cluster of old houses and narrow streets, while on a slope to the west rises the stolid Riddarholm Church, the Swedish Pantheon, where those to whom the great names of history are something more than dry headings in text-books may pause by the royal sarcophagi to meditate on the amazing martial exploits of Gustavus Adolphus and of that Lion of Judah, Charles XII, about whom I have written before and who is forthrightly described in a Latin inscription above the main portal of the Royal Palace (which he built) as “HERCULES”.



But the architectural treasures of the City between the Bridges are not to be discovered in this Storkyrkan picture, for they arose more than a century after it was painted in logical continuity of the tradition that has made Stockholm the capital *par excellence* of artist and artisan. Not until the eighteenth century was the extraordinarily imposing and symmetrically satisfying Royal Palace built by Nicodemus Tessin, to-day a magnet to which the eye is drawn again and again, as inevitably as to the Acropolis at Athens. The eighteenth century also gave to Stockholm its Hall of the Knights, or Palace of the Nobility, a beautiful structure in the Dutch Renaissance style, modelled after the Mauritshuis at The Hague by Simon and Jean de la Vallée, and Drottningholm Palace with its unique French theatre and intact properties and costumes, its art treasures and priceless tapestries, which lies, however, some miles outside the city on the shores of the Mälars lake.

The historic homes of Old Stockholm are of course to be found in that maze of narrow streets behind the Storkyrka, flanked by plain and precipitous façades and many boasting baroque doorways crowned by worn pediments and architraves where the coats-of-arms of the original occupants are still in place. In this district also lies the quaint "Den Gyldene Freden" restaurant with its famous medieval vaults where Bellman, the great eighteenth-century poet and troubadour, the Swedish Burns, first composed and sung to his own guitar accompaniment those lively lyrics which are still among the most popular songs in modern Sweden. Here lunch or dinner, preceded by the inevitable, soul-warming *snaps*, is an experience for a foreigner the memory of which may well prove life-long!—"To the visitor from abroad the first fiery draught of *brännvin* is a test of self-composure. The uninitiated weep involuntarily, they are speechless." Marquis B. Childs)—especially if he has the good fortune to be entertained, as I was, by the Editor of one of Stockholm's leading newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To preserve this revered corner of Old Stockholm Anders Zorn bought the building and, after restoration, presented it to the Swedish Academy in perpetuity.





Ideally situated as Stockholm is, set like a mighty jewel amid unspoiled scenery and flowing silvery waters, diversified by so many open parks and flower-filled gardens, with fine and noble buildings both in the Old City and the New, perhaps the highest tribute which can be paid to it is to say that it has no slums. Of what other great capital can this be said? Certainly not of London, nor of Paris, nor of Rome, nor of pre-war Berlin, nor of the elegant and noble city of Madrid. In this well-favoured northern metropolis, where life vibrates with health and optimism, the right and proper conditions are provided for a happy and useful existence, not alone for the comfortable classes but for rich and poor alike. Why so? Because Sweden, which has enjoyed uninterrupted peace for well over a century, has had the time and the enterprise to translate into reality the Utopian dreams of other nations for the greatest good of the greatest number.

In Stockholm more than fifty thousand families live in model garden settlements. Sixty per cent of the city's workmen inhabit new and thoroughly up-to-date flats in the many-storied blocks built by the "H.S.B." organisation, whose activities extend to sixty-eight townships—with central heating, laid-on hot water, bathrooms, frigidaire and mechanised wash-houses; while the "Kollektivhuset" service flats have solved for the professional classes the problem of running a home satisfactorily where both the wife and the husband are engaged in outside activities. Every third inhabitant is on the telephone, and the best hospital, polyclinic or dental treatment is available for a few kronor a day. The aged are cared for in such model establishments as the Gammelby and Stureby Homes, while schools constructed on the most enlightened principles in regard to light and fresh air supply every faculty for the practice of that health-giving physical culture for which Sweden is everywhere renowned; and what facilities the schools do not provide are supplied by the Stadium, the Sports Palace, the swimming baths, and by Stockholm's eleven large athletic grounds. . . .

Writing of Stockholm now, many months after my last visit, a panorama of scenes, windswept and coruscating in the glow of the northern summer days and nights, passes before "that inner

eye which is the bliss of solitude" the view from Valdemarsudde with the busy steamers heaving past Beckholm island; those exquisite pictures of the city framed in the oblong windows of the Thiel gallery; high-prowed sea-going steamers and yachts tethered to the Norrström quays below the Royal Palace; Kungsträdgården at noon with the birds singing, the flower-beds rioting in the bright sunlight, and Charles XII gazing from his pedestal towards Soviet Russia and away from the Palace of Karlberg where he learned the rudiments of military strategy ("Look, Mummy," said the little daughter of the wife of the Finnish Minister, "he's directing the trams!"); the capital spread out far beneath the terrace of the Nordiska Kompaniet Department Store; Väsagatan in a sudden downpour, with everybody racing to the shelter of the Post Office and the Central Station; Skansen in the long twilight with hundreds of happy people lustily singing Swedish folk-songs; two fishermen standing silent and motionless on a polished primeval rock by a lake at midnight near Näsby, with the moon and the afterglow of the sun shining simultaneously on the silken waters.

Of Stockholm, equally with Auckland, might Kipling have written his moving lines:

Last, loneliest, loveliest, exquisite, apart,  
 On us, on us the unswerving season smiles,  
 Who wonder mid our fern why men depart  
 To seek the Happy Isles!

## CHAPTER XX

### STOCKHOLM NOTES

*When Swedenborg received ghosts in his summer bouse in Stockholm, Virgil was one of those with whom he conversed most willingly.*

VIKTOR RYDBERG, *Paul in Naples*  
(translated by the Baroness Ottilia von Dueben)

THE STORKYRKA, or "Great Church", the oldest existing ecclesiastical structure in Stockholm, is built on the crest of the rise dominating the small island on which the capital of Sweden originally arose in the later Middle Ages. Here, in contrast to the broad and stately streets and boulevards across the water where the massive red tower of the Town Hall soars into the sky, the thoroughfares are narrow and cobbled, the houses flat-fronted and sheer, not a few of them bearing exactly the same aspect as they did centuries ago; and some with historic cellars like the Gyldene Freden where, as I said in the previous chapter, Bellman sang most of his popular lyrics for the first time, and where to-day may be enjoyed some of the best cooking in Stockholm preceded by a *snaps* calculated to scorch the most hardened interior.

On this small island, situated at the head of the famed archipelago, inhabited since the days of Birger Jarl, and, in fact, geographically the navel of Sweden, cluster a group of buildings of the greatest architectural splendour. Most conspicuous of all is, of course, the extraordinarily massive and imposing Royal Palace, built to the designs of Nicodemus Tessin between 1690 and 1754, where Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, Marshal of France and Prince of Pontecorvo, took up residence when he succeeded to the Swedish crown in 1818 at the invitation of the Riksdag. Less conspicuous but of even greater architectural distinction is the Hall of the Knights, to which I make no apology for referring again, an Assembly Hall of the Swedish Nobility, a *chef d'œuvre* in the Dutch Renaissance style, as fine as the Mauritzhuis at

The Hague, which it closely resembles, and the handsomest seventeenth-century building in perfect preservation in the capital. On a rise to the right of the Assembly Hall stands the Riddarholm Church; from the crest of the hill on the other side soars the dark mass of the Storkyrka, its tapering spire thrusting high above the surrounding houses, as it is shown doing in the early pictures of Old Stockholm.

The interior of the Storkyrka is ornate as Bavarian baroque, adorned with immense silver chandeliers and a massive gilt pulpit and gilt thrones on each side of the nave; for Sweden's kings are crowned here. There is one corner of the church, however, to the left of the high altar, which bears an austere beauty of its own, strikingly in contrast to the rest of the interior. Here slender, red-brick columns rise above rows of worn armorial tombstones, and a delicate arch frames the gorgeous rose-window.

In this appropriate setting the civic authorities have placed for citizens and duly amazed visitors to admire one of Sweden's greatest artistic treasures, the St. Gorans Monument, or St. George group, a superb masterpiece of the medieval wood-carver's skill, executed for the Storkyrka by one Master Bernt Notke, a Lübeck craftsman, in 1489 to the order of the Lord Protector Sten Sture in commemoration of the defeat of the Danish troops at Brunkeberg in 1471.

In this marvellous life-size work of art the dual idealistic and realistic purport of medievalism is fully expressed. The group, seen either from the front or from one of the sides, is startling in its vibrant strength and highly graphic animation. In this sculpture one may find all the nascent spiritual grace of Donatello's Gattamelata, all the indomitable and invincible might of Verrochio's Colleoni. With the Aurelian statue on the Capitoline Hill and the laughing Can Grande at Verona, it is unquestionably one of the great equestrian groups of Europe.

The Storkyrkan St. George wears a helmet like a crown from which two immense ostrich plumes are flung into the air by the sudden and abrupt check in the charge, and a complete suit of battle-armour (by the style of it from an Augsburg armourer's smithy) with every bolt and join perfectly moulded. The knight's

left hand reins in with ease his dappled grey mount which, decked out in all the ornately gorgeous harness-trappings of the age of chivalry, rears spiritedly above the evil and truly terrifying figure of the dragon. Rising in the stirrups to his full height, St. George lifts his right arm to its ultimate reach while a mailed right hand grasps a long Damascus sword with which the knight is about to cleave the skull of his prostrate but still dangerous adversary.

The noble figure of the horse, with its staring, bloodshot eyes and dilated nostrils (from which one almost sees the hot breath pumping) recalls in a moment those equine heads by Pheidias rising from the sea, from the western pediment of the Parthenon. The Storkyrkan animal is so true to life in every quivering nerve and rippling muscle that involuntarily the visitor waits for a shuddering neigh to shake the surrounding air, and is surprised when it does not come!

Beneath its pawing hooves sprawls the obscenely horrific green and clawing mass of the dragon which, gripping a shattered lance, rears up in a paroxysm of rage, and shoots forth a long scarlet tongue like an enveloping flame to scorch and flay the redoubtable knight and his gallant mount. Its long, bony tail, shaped like an immense flail, viciously beats the air, while scattered along the flanks of the writhing mass lie spewed limbs and dank and gaping heads of the monster's victims.

A loathsome atmosphere of death and corruption and infuriated satanism is here engendered by the sculptor's genius, which finds its opposite pole of expression in the radiant and serenely confident pose of the knight who—as the madonna-like princess watches from her knees on a nearby pedestal—in this instantaneous gesture of righteous onslaught and unconquerable will, seems to be demonstrating in a single moment of time the whole Christian concept of the power of Good over Evil.

In this spirit Lepanto was won and the Holy Sepulchre freed; such a quenchless spiritual vision as has here been crystallised for our wonder and amazement kept the torch burning through the Dark Ages and gave due birth to the Gothic miracles of Chartres and Burgos, Wells and Ulm.

\* \* \* \* \*



## FOOTSTEPS OF ST. BRIDGET

Not many English miles beyond Stockholm, lying north of the railway line running from Rimbo to Norrtälje, in the Roslagen region of the east coast from where the "Eastern Vikings" set out on their expeditions to Russia and Byzantium, are to be seen at this day the foundations of Finsta Manor where St. Bridget was born in the year 1302. Here, in a serene family atmosphere of piety and affection, the child who was to become the greatest woman of her epoch and is still the most famous woman of the North, grew up under the devoted care of her parents, the Uppland Puisne Judge, Lagman Birger Pedersson, and his wife, the Lady Ingeborg. Birger Pedersson was a descendant of an ancient Swedish line and related to the royal house of the Folkungs, in fact own cousin to the reigning king; and Bridget's mother was frequently in attendance at the Court on the Queen. In later years Bridget herself exercised considerable influence over King Magnus, who was her second cousin. . . .

To-day these tumbled, moss-covered walls and stones at Finsta are the object of veneration on the part of a small community of nuns of the Bridgettine Order living not far away in an idyllically situated *Birgittabæm* at Djursholm, embosomed in trees and commanding delightful views over the eastern reaches of Lake Björken.

Once before the war I had visited the community while staying at Näsby; and on a showery afternoon in the summer of 1947 I turned my footsteps thither once more during a walk in the neighbourhood. In between the showers I managed to cover a considerable distance, and presently, during a break in the clouds, and a welcome burst of sunshine, discovered myself to be in the right region but unmistakably lost. I enquired the direction in English of a man mowing grass at the roadside, who thereupon desisted from his work and described for some minutes in slow idiomatic Swedish the correct turnings to take. Had a translation been requested I could not have got beyond a word or two; but I apprehended the *sounds* perfectly, and soon found my way without further ado to the small local station of Vikingsvägen and the

convent a few steps beyond, merely by following out the directions given in a "language I did not understand".<sup>1</sup> . . .

The Mother Superior herself, an Englishwoman who had spent several years at the fourteenth-century Bridgettine house in the Piazza Farnese at Rome, wearing the typical grey serge habit and the charming linen "crown" of the Order with its five red spots signifying the Wounds of Our Lord's Passion, brought a tea-tray with some tasty confectionery and insisted that I move a comfortable garden seat with footrest under a large tree and enjoy an hour's meditation while the permanent guests finished their *Middag*—for, with the exceptions of their enclosed convents, the Bridgettine communities support themselves in this useful way. Later she returned and led me, somewhat reluctantly, away from the heavenly peace of that garden into the convent reception room, a bright and cheerful apartment gay with fresh-cut flowers.

Decorating the walls of the room were old etchings of the ruins of Finsta, a print of Raphael's great painting of St. Bridget with Pope Innocent VI, whom she brought back to Rome from Avignon after twenty years of exile; a dramatic picture of the expulsion of the Bridgettine nuns from Syon House, Twickenham, by order of Henry VIII, and a wistful study of St. Katherine, who went to Rome on a visit in 1352 and remained at her mother's side for twenty years. St. Bridget died on Saturday, July 23, 1373, on the refectory table—still to be seen—where she had written most of the *Revelations*.

St. Katherine, who was tall, "like some graceful silver birch near a strong Scotch pine",<sup>2</sup> and who had "blue eyes and brilliantly fair complexion" like so many of her countrywomen at the present day, is always depicted in prints and statues with a doe at her side, and I asked the Reverend Mother the reason for this.

"Well, you see," she replied, seated opposite and looking

<sup>1</sup> "A waggoner who had on a lined jacket met Stykar, the Marshal of King Harald. Styka asked: 'Wilt thou sell the jacket, bondi?' He answered: 'Not to thee; thou must be a Northman. I know thy speech.'" *Fornmanna Saga*: "Battle of Stamford Bridge".

<sup>2</sup> *Saint Birgitta of Sweden* (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1933), an excellent and absorbing biography by my friend Sister Edith Peacey, to whom I am also indebted for other information about the Swedish Saint.

not unlike St. Katherine herself, "Katherine was walking one morning in the Corso, where you and I have walked too, when a young doe pressed against her side for protection from the huntsmen following in hot pursuit. She at once concealed the animal from the hunters, who rushed by without suspecting that their quarry was hidden in the habit of the tall and beautiful nun who stood, statue-like, by the wall of a palace until they were out of sight."

Once, near Spoleto, when Katherine was on pilgrimage with her mother to visit the tomb of St. Francis in the Lower Church at Assisi—speaking to this day of the unreserved and absolute devotion of one of the greatest Saints in the Calendar—that golden Northern loveliness had attracted the profane gaze of night robbers in a barn where the party were resting.

. . . the men stopped what they were doing and gazed in amazement. The sight of Katherine's beautiful face, lit up by the rays of the firelight, held them spellbound. The blue eyes and the brilliantly fair complexion were dazzling to see. . . . The sight of such beauty was too much for the brigands. It must be possessed, not merely admired from a distance.

But St. Bridget saw her daughter's peril and prayed "in an intensity of love and trust. . . . The sound of horses' hoofs coming up the stone path was heard by everyone inside the barn." The brigands seized their belongings and fled. . . .

CHAPTER XXI  
STOCKHOLM NOTES (*continued*)

*The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands and feet Proportion.*

WILLIAM BLAKE, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

DROTTNINGHOLM

WITH FRIENDS, A SON and a daughter of a Professor of Physics at Uppsala, from the Ålsten residential district which, in conformation of antediluvian rock and the fauna, is remarkably reminiscent of Mosman, New South Wales, I rowed out one Sunday afternoon after a family lunch in a new boat, only lately arrived from the idyllic east coast isle of Öland, to an uninhabited islet in a corner of Lake Mälaren. Leaving the boat in a small cove, we climbed over immense moss-covered rocks and scrambled through deep woods to a steep cliff from where a splendid view was obtained of the Ålsten shore. Then we wandered back to a small bathing beach and while the daughter returned to the cove to bring the boat round through the high reeds her brother and I undressed and plunged into the cool waters of the lake.

The afternoon was a symphony in green; there was green everywhere: in the swaying regiments of reeds, along the shore with its massed trees and tangled undergrowth, on other green islands rising, cloud-like, to meet a clear sky flecked with wandering woolpack—and Stockholm itself lay on the other side of a massive rise of houses and green trees to the east. "Drottningholm is just across that bridge," remarked the daughter, indicating with a nod in the opposite direction a thin line above the distant water, as she passed me the oars midway to shore in a sudden deluge of rain. (Soon we were back in the cosy drawing-room at Ålsten taking coffee and cakes, listening to "Finlandia" on records, and turning over the pages of finely printed art books with reproductions of Zorn and Larsson, and of statuary groups by the modern

Finnish sculptor Aaltonen who, I venture to affirm—although his work is unknown as yet outside Scandinavia—is the greatest lyric sculptor working in Europe to-day and spiritually allied to Matéo Inurria of Cordova, of whom I have written elsewhere.)

Drottningholm—the Swedish Versailles, the foremost and most beautiful, architecturally, of the country palaces of the Swedish kings; a dream of white steps and porticoes, of green lawns running down to the water's edge, of a seventeenth-century French "lay-out" perfectly adapted to a Swedish environment. Drottningholm, with its priceless gobelins, its vast and splendid Hall of State, its ceiling paintings by Sylvius and stucco decoration by Carove, its royal portraits, including one of Queen Victoria, its huge paintings of the chase by Ehrenstrahl and its commemorative portraits by David von Krafft of Charles XII and eighteen of his generals.

The liquid-sounding name carried me back in memory to a golden afternoon of that summer between the world wars when I had first visited Sweden from Egypt, sailing all the way from Alexandria on a cargo-steamer of the Swedish Orient Line; to an afternoon when the wife of a noted Swedish artist had shown me round the unique French theatre erected during the reign of the francophile Gustaf III, whose culture, urbanity and good sense should have saved him but did not from the assassin's bullet; with all its theatre equipment, costumes, decorations and stage scenery, including "waves" worked by hand from off-stage to supply the illusion of a storm at sea. Yes, it had been a memorable afternoon, and I was sorry indeed to miss a repetition in 1946 when delegates and members of the 18th Congress of the International P.E.N. were invited to a dramatic performance by the Friends of the Drottningholm Theatre (but who are its enemies?), because of an indisposition brought on by a salt-sea bathe at Saltsjöbaden. "An experience I would not have missed for anything," visitors said on their return, which was only rubbing salt into the wound. . . .

Haga Palace, too, much nearer Stockholm, where Princess Sybilla lives with her children, is redolent of the Gustavian era, when it was praised by Bellman in a lyric—of which a fair English rendering follows—with music of his own composing:

## STOCKHOLM NOTES

Butterflies to Haga faring  
When the frost and fogs are spent,  
Find the woods their home preparing,  
Flower-enwrought their pleasure-tent.  
Insects from their winter trances  
Newly wakened by the sun  
O'er the marsh hold festal dances  
And along the dock-leaves run.

Haga, on thy bosom dozes  
Many a plot of verdure brave,  
And the snowy swan reposes  
Proudly on thy rippling wave.  
In the woods a distant clamour  
Comes re-echoed faint and fine:  
From the quarry sounds the hammer  
Axes ring mid birch and pine.

\* \* \* \*

### NAVAL WEDDING

From just beyond the National Museum on the Norrström waterfront a bridge joins modern Stockholm with the small island of Skeppsholmen, the midland centre of the Swedish Navy. Strolling this afternoon through the shady walks and ascending a road past the naval barracks to the highest rise in the island, I presently found myself outside a small hexagonal church built in the early reign of Charles XIV (Marshal Bernadotte). A naval wedding was about to be celebrated. Young men in full evening dress and sporting large buttonholes of white carnations stood on the steps welcoming the guests, who were arriving in a stream of cars.

Observing me standing respectfully but curiously below, one of the young men, the best man, I surmised, said quietly in English "You may come in if you like"; so I entered and sat down in one of the back pews. All along the aisle sprigs of silver birch with their lemon-green leaves attached seemed to bring the loveliness of Swedish rural landscapes right into the church; and when the bride entered on the arm of her tall father to the sweet pealing of the organ overhead, her crown of green myrtle added the last appropriate touch to the scene.

The ceremony, which was simple and dignified, was followed by a solo from a fine soprano in the choral gallery, whose voice of sonorous purity thrilled the very rafters of the small church. The officiating minister, who may have been in his sixtieth year, sang the responses in a robust and ringing tenor which I found strangely moving. While he was delivering the marriage homily the bride and bridegroom, a tall and serene young man, turned from the altar rail and faced with complete unself-consciousness the congregation, headed by Vice-Admiral Strömbäck, of the Royal Swedish Navy; indeed, the bridesmaid, a sister of the bride, seemed the most affected as she stood beside them in a brilliant frock of yellow silk, holding an enormous bouquet of lilies.

As the procession filed down towards the open door, through which golden sunlight streamed, the bride, one white-gloved arm reposing gently on the arm of the groom, smiled and bowed to members of the congregation on each side. She might have been a Queen!—(a Norse word, from the Danish *Kvinnor*).

But then, is not every woman truly queen and madonna on her wedding-day? (that is, on the *first* wedding-day)—and to the devil with the French cynic who declares that he does not know which is the *worst*, “to lose or to win the woman you love”!

Here was a glimpse, fortuitous and unexpected and therefore all the more authentic, of the heart of the real Sweden.

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### “HIMLASPELET”

While I was still in bed this morning in the luxurious flat of my kind hostess, a 'phone call came through from a young Belgian writer resident in Stockholm with an invitation to make up a party of six Congress members for whom a special viewing was to be given in the private Wivefilm studios in Kungsgatan, of a film rendering of the celebrated play “Himlaspelet” (“The Road to Heaven”). “Do not fail to meet us there at nine o'clock,” the voice said; “it is a fine film; you will not be disappointed.”

The author, Rune Lindström, had written the story while he was a theological student at Uppsala University, and had also

directed the film and acted the male lead. He was introduced to us, a fresh and handsome young Dalecarlian with corn-coloured hair, and remained during most of the screening, obviously absorbed in his handiwork.

The scene takes place in Dalarna in the seventeenth century, when the peasantry were living in the state of Arcadian simplicity and remoteness, and hovering superstitiousness, which Longfellow found still existing in the lonely countryside of Sweden at the beginning of last century. A tall and beautiful yeoman's daughter, after becoming affianced to a neighbouring farmer (Lindström), is accused by a jealous admirer before the village elders of being a witch and bringing ruin on the crops, and after a solemn and terrifying trial in the lakeside church—obviously Rättvik—is chained down in a barn and burned to death. "The Road to Heaven" is the path of sacrifice and renunciation by following which her stricken lover finds at last peace of mind and heart in the contemplation of the eternal.

Many of the "shots" bring to life the quaint peasant art of the period and the typical paintings of biblical episodes to be seen on Dalecarlian furniture and wooden walls until the coming of the railways (but now chiefly preserved in exhibits at such national collections as the Nordiska Museum), such as the prophet Elijah going up to heaven in a local farm cart and clad in high top hat, black gloves and frock coat! The golden beauty of the farm-girl, the local costumes of men and women photographed against the rolling, flower-decked landscapes, and the views of Lake Siljan, were breath-taking. The acting, too, was moving and convincing.

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#### VANADISBADET

It may be of interest to the unco' guid and the unco' moralistic to know that attendants who take away the clothes of male bathers at the fine Vanadisbadet open-air swimming baths run by the Stockholm Municipal Sports Council on Sveavägen, are females, and very nice females too. The age of the pleasant young lady who removed all my garments from a mobile metal "horse" where I had unwittingly arranged them upside down, and who placed



them in the correct order for hanging until needed, was, I should say, twenty or less.

Outside my cubicle, enjoying the sunshine which came streaming through the great misted plate-glass windows, a youth already disrobed stood with one foot raised on a bench looking the very image of a Greek athlete from Delphi or Olympia (but not a Zany), and at the end of the hall Swedish men who did not bother about cubicles were robing and disrobing in full view of the corps of green-frocked attendants. "The crimes of Clapham are chaste in Montauban."

Of course, everyone wore slips in the bathing pool.

(One afternoon the following summer, on the principle of trying anything once, I entered the smart Baths in Stureplan, in central Stockholm, and took a badstue, or Finnish bath. The receptionist beamed at the brave *Engelsman*, when returning from a locker afterwards my watch, wallet and purse, as I emerged all fresh and ruddy after being soaped, pommelled, massaged and slapped around by a perfect Juno of Swedish womanhood, and then draped in a Roman consular robe by another on rising, naked as Aphrodite herself, from the cool green swimming pool. Several Nordic Apollos were roasting in the steaming-rooms, or standing statuesquely before their cubicles.

It was all perfectly chaste, wholesome and above board, and I strode up Kungsgatan ("King-street") feeling every inch a man, and mightily uplifted by the novel experience, which I commend to our repressed and mentally inhibited race and especially to the unco' guid. As evidence of the healthy rivalry in these matters in Sweden, I was informed by a Swedish friend that a correspondence raged some time ago in a Gothenburg paper on whether male attendants should be introduced into women's baths as a *quid pro quo!*)

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### "LIMPIA-BOTAS"

This morning, on the verge of the Kungsträdgården park opposite the main entrance of the Nordiska Kompaniet store on Hamngatan, my shoes were cleaned by a young man who had

fought on the Republican side on the Ebro during the Spanish Civil War. He remarked on several stains in the bright brown leather and said that the shoe-shiner who had left them there had not done his job properly. When I mentioned that the footwear had been purchased in Madrid the previous autumn during a two-thousand mile journey through Spain he became suddenly animated and started to speak at once in heart-warming Castilian, in which mellifluous tongue we conversed for the remainder of my occupation of his "chair".

He was anxious to learn of present conditions in Spain, ten years after the war between brothers, and did not seem very impressed with my testimony that order, at least, now reigned there. He had taken part in the terrible Teruel campaign, when the troops slept in their waterproofs on the snow-covered battlefield in Siberian temperatures.

"*Adios, señor,*" he said, as I stepped down from the rostrum; "*muy buenas.*"

The life-giving sun was streaming down, and smartly dressed people walked past with buoyant and expectant expressions on their handsome faces. I might have been leaving a *limpia-botas* youth in Madrid's Puerta del Sol!

CHAPTER XXII  
SWIMMING AT SALTSJÖBADEN

*And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy  
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be  
Borne, like thy bubbles, onward.*

BYRON, *Childe Harold*, Canto iv.

WHAT LONG ISLAND is to New York or Brighton to London; what Scheveningen is to The Hague, St. Kilda to Melbourne, or Manly to Sydney (which, for situation and amenities, bears so striking a resemblance to Stockholm): even so is Saltsjöbaden ("Salt Sea Baths") to the Swedish capital—albeit in a quieter and more discreet and exclusive relationship.

Although all the environs of Stockholm—lovely Lake Mälaren, the "Skerries", and the Baltic seaboard—are noted for their natural beauties and for the infinite choice they offer to holiday-makers and sportsmen of secluded isles or wooded shoreland: although the swimmer, the yachtsman, the fisherman, the camper (and in winter the skier, the skater, and the ice-yachtsman) can go to Gripsholm or Drottningholm, Strängnäs or Västerås, to Vaxholm, Gustavsberg, Dalarö, the rocky islet of Utö, to Nynäshamn, from where the steamers ply to Visby, or to Sandhamn, where the regattas of the Royal Swedish Yacht Club take place each July—if you ask a Swede at home or abroad for a pleasant resort near Stockholm wherein to spend an enjoyable week-end, nine times out of ten he will say—Saltsjöbaden. I heard the magic name uttered enthusiastically in the Mediterranean, on board the Swedish Orient Line's fine motor-cargo ships, and in the woody suburb of Djursholm: and always the speaker's expression lit up—even as it does when the beloved name of Visby is spoken.

Saltsjöbaden, Visby—Visby, Saltsjöbaden: in such antiphonic refrain is expressed the deep love of Swedish people for the beauties of a prodigal nature, for broad skies, quiet woods and old forests, for wide expanses of shining water, long white





beaches, ivied ruins, and for all of Nature's haunts of health and tranquillity.

One important reason why Saltsjöbaden, as the principal resort in the archipelago, is so popular is because it is the most easily accessible of sea resorts and therefore served by an excellent electric train service from the centre of the capital—or so near as makes no matter, the station being only a ten-minutes' tram ride from Gustav Adolf's Torg, the fine central square of the city (with the Parliament House, the Royal Opera House, the Foreign Office, and the majestic Royal Palace all near at hand). From Stockholm Saltsjöbaden can be reached in twenty minutes by the electric train, or in thirty minutes by motor-car, or in an hour and a half by the steamer, which passes on the way the lovely Skuru Sound.

During the cold months all kinds of winter sports are to be enjoyed there, and in summer it is an ideal holiday-ground for the yachtsman, the swimmer, the sun-bather, the golfer, the tennis player (with excellent *en-tout-cas* courts), and even for the astronomer, for the new observatory has been built on the hills above Saltsjöbaden: or simply for the beauty-loving idler, of whom the industrious R. L. Stevenson wrote such a lively apology, to be echoed later by W. H. Davies, the "tramp" poet:

What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare . . .

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

On a bright day of summer Beauty's feet certainly do dance around the wooded shores of the Neglinge lake, and on the salt waters of the Baggensfjärden, a fiord of the Baltic where the bathing is so fine and where are found such wide and spacious sheets of water for boating and yachting expeditions among the innumerable small islands in the neighbourhood.

Because of the nearness of the resort to Stockholm many city families have their summer villas at Saltsjöbaden, where they spend each summer week-end. Nor are curative, cultural or

spiritual needs neglected, for a sanatorium is provided and a large and handsome temple, the Church of the Revelation, rises majestically above the shores of the lake, with sculptures and bronze doors by Sweden's greatest sculptor, Carl Milles, and paintings by Olle Hjortzberg, a notable modern artist. The cost of the building of the Church of the Revelation was defrayed by a wealthy city bank director, Hr. Knut Wallenberg, of whom indeed it may be said that Saltsjöbaden is virtually his creation. . . .

The Grand Hotel at Saltsjöbaden is considered one of the most comfortable and luxurious hotels in the North, with no little resemblance to that acknowledged masterpiece of modern comfort, Mena House near Cairo. Then there is also the Badhotellet, an up-to-date medicinal and recreational establishment, and the Sommarhotellet—open only, as its name implies, in summer-time; while the Grand Restaurant, situated in a charmingly rustic and wooded terrain and with its glass and open-air terraces overlooking the hotel bathing-beaches and sands, supplies all that may be desired in the way of substantial and exquisitely cooked meals and liquid refreshment—all being served in the typical Swedish atmosphere of graciousness and civility.

Saltsjöbaden—name like a run of mellow notes from a guitar, or like the opening apostrophe of some sonorous ode! And the swimming is as good as at Phaleron, or as the bay of Phaleron was before the Piraeus was ruined by enemy bombers. . . .

At the lunch and reception to the P.E.N. Congress in the Grand Hotel in June, 1946, Mr. Desmond McCarthy, the President ("not a bad old chap" as my friend Roy Campbell writes in his *Georgiad*) gave a most eloquent reply to a somewhat long-winded speech of welcome from a local worthy.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HISTORIC ANNIVERSARY AT GRIPSHOLM

*At Gripsholm, Queen Margaret (d. 1551) superintended a large dairy farm, and looked sharply after the two-and-twenty pretty dairymaids who milked the cows and made the butter. The amount of labour accomplished would make modern agriculturists stare.*

FRANCIS H. BUMPUS, *The Cathedrals of Norway, Sweden and Denmark*, p. 83

IT WAS ILLUMINATING to observe at the opening ceremony of the four hundredth anniversary of Gripsholm Castle, in Södermanland, celebrated before the war, that many of the banners so prominently displayed below the platform, where a student choir was massed to do the musical honours, represented Swedish Labour groups and organisations. For Labour organisations in Sweden smack of conservatism and tradition, and even the Swedish Communist Party is of a pale pink complexion.

A thousand voices joined in the singing of the Swedish National Anthem, as King Gustaf and the royal party took up their places before the student choir. Beyond the immense throng gathered on the castle lawns, which extended like a vast carpet of green down to the lake-shore, soared the massive and mellowed walls of the famous and imposing stronghold which came into the possession in 1526 of Gustavus Vasa, who often lived there and there formed the nucleus of the present enormous collection of two thousand historical portraits. All the windows of the castle which were visible to us were crowded with spectators; soft summer zephyrs rustled through the tall trees; while the calm expanse of Mälaren glittered and gleamed in bright sunlight.

The most popular features of the festival proved to be the plays and pageants incorporating the best-known events in Sweden's history since Vasa times, such as "Det stora Kalaset", in which hundreds of actors took part all dressed in period costumes. In this pageant, enacted before another wall of the castle, was dramatically and most convincingly presented the great story of Gustavus Vasa's tactful conciliation of those provinces



which had opposed his assumption of the royal prerogatives after his decisive defeat of the Danes. In this memorable spectacle Edvin Adolphson made an ideal Vasa, with his penetrating bass voice and commanding presence, as the spirited white horse on which he was mounted pranced over the ground to the slow chant of a procession of monks, and the rhythmic song of the proud yeomen farmers from Dalecarlia and Värmland, which brought to some of us new revelations of the poetic cadences of the Swedish tongue.

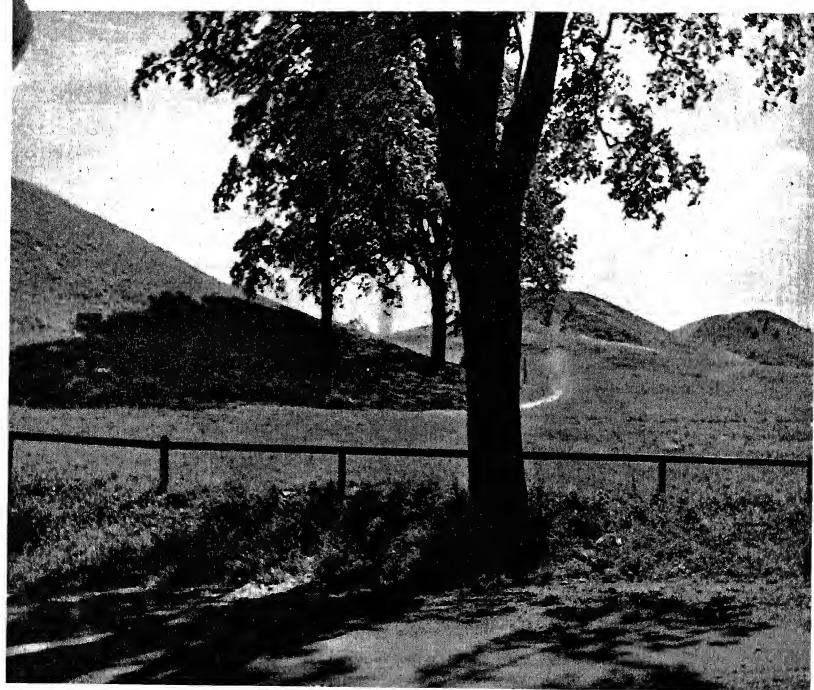
Another stirring feature of this pageant was when, at the distant echo of a trumpet in the forest, the young "king" emerged over the brow of a hill leading a troop of Dalecarlian yeomen, who came winding over the fields and so into the arena. . . .

In the centre of the second row of spectators the late Selma Lagerlöf sat like a queen receiving the homage of her subjects. At intervals during the performance, children would shyly approach her chair and then give a bob-curtsey, which she acknowledged with a bow and a beaming smile from those noble, deeply wrinkled features. It was the only time I saw her, for when I found myself at last at the portal of her ancestral home Mårbacka, in incomparable Värmland, she had already been laid to rest beside her parents in the idyllic lakeside churchyard at East Ämtervik, the most beautifully situated cemetery I have ever seen, I think, although that at Filipstad is claimed as the most beautiful in Sweden.

At this anniversary *Fest* at Gripsholm it was possible to get to know quite a lot about Sweden and Swedish history, and about the Swedish people too, in a few hours. People had come in from all parts, travelling, some of them for many days, by rail, omnibus, car, coach, motor-cycle, bicycle, and on foot or horseback. And then so many diverse aspects of Swedish social and cultural life were represented.

After the pageant had ended, with a kind of massed bacchanal of the three hundred performers in which the later Middle Ages seemed to spring to life, one could walk through the grounds and the beautiful gardens laid out by Hedvig Eleonora, the Queen of Charles X, who also erected the "Queen's Wing" of the castle—





which Gustaf III, not to be outdone, paralleled a century later with a "Cavalier's Wing"—listening to one of the many fine bands playing rococo, martial, or patriotic music. And there was melodious community singing too, and Swedish drill and gymnastics by stalwart teams of athletes.

Beside the lake stood the tents of an improvised Tivoli-fair, a miniature of the celebrated all-the-year fairs at Stockholm and Copenhagen (but what possible link they have with the classic serenity of Tivoli itself, with its sweet cascades amid the coronal of the Alban hills, I have never been able to discover). A regatta was held on the lake, and on the wide green sward where refreshments were being served at long tables relays of teams wearing the National costumes leaped and twirled to the ancient rhythms showered on the grass by busy pipers and fiddlers as they carried through the measures of folk-dances animated and enchanting as those of Spain. And one evening, before the eighteenth-century comedy by Marivaux opened in the Gustavian court theatre tucked away in one of the high towers, the Ballet from the Royal Opera House in Stockholm danced beneath the castle walls scenes of charm, grace and beauty. . . .

The most vivid and unforgettable impression of this visit, however, came to me from a castle casement high up in the massive tower where an impatient audience was waiting for the curtain to rise on a costume play by Marivaux. The sun was low in the vast sky, which was aglow with all those imperceptibly changing hues of evening which, because of the long summer night, distinguish Sweden from all other lands. I glanced through the oval window before entering the theatre—what an exquisite miniature! Below was the sheer red declivity of the sixteenth-century wall falling to wide green lawns dotted with burgeoning chestnut trees and white and purple lilac and spreading flower-beds, with a corner of the lake in the middle distance gleaming like silvery satin. Beyond this stretch of tranquil water again loomed up an avenue of giant beech trees, and round the opposite shore clustered the red roofs and slowly tapering spires of the little village of Mariefred where the Protector Sten Sture had established a Carthusian monastery in the fifteenth century, which, with all the monastic foundations

throughout the country, was dissolved by Gustavus Vasa, who was a true if misguided son of the Reformation which brought permanent spiritual disaffection to a Europe which had been united under the See of St. Peter for fifteen hundred years.

Across that vast canvas of the northern summer sky all the primary colours came and went in turn, then merged one into the other and finally dissolved, leaving a luminous, permeating greyish tone everywhere, in which subdued light the water-colour which, at its greatest excellence, was infused with all the limpid brilliance of Vermeer's "Delft", changed into a firm drypoint.

The view could be enjoyed and memorised for a few moments only, for then the first notes of the orchestra drew us all into the darkened theatre, where we were soon absorbed in the mannered simpering and shepherdess posturings of the Silvia and the Dorante of Alice and Ernst Eklund, and the self-possessed Lisette of Ingall Anström. But that perfect cameo of Mariefred on a matchless summer evening will, I know, remain while memory lasts.

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Few outside Scandinavia, except painters and art critics, have heard of the unique picture collection at Gripsholm, "the pantheon of Swedish memories", comprising two thousand historical portraits which occupy the walls of its state apartments and interminable galleries. Neither the Pitti nor the Uffizi, whose connecting galleries as I remember them seem almost to be wallpapered with indifferent portraits, have anything like that number of first-rank historical likenesses on permanent exhibition.

Foremost among the Swedish portraitists represented are Ehrenstrahl, with a hundred and eighty canvases, David von Krafft's Charles XII, and a highly interesting study of him painted when he was a prisoner of the Turks at Bender in 1713 by Axel Sparre—and Roslin whose glowing paintings of powdered and bewigged Court beauties and gallants are among the glories of the National collections. A full-length study of Jenny Lind seated at the piano, by J. Asker, gives almost a "singing" likeness of the Swedish nightingale, who took London by storm and died

a naturalised Englishwoman; and there is a lovely portrait by an unknown artist of Mary Stuart as a child, with tiny rose-bud mouth, great dark limpid eyes, and aureole of auburn-gold hair (too fair and lovely a head by far to fall beneath the axe at Fotheringay). In the Hall are two full-length portrait-studies contemporary with Gustavus Vasa, of outstanding historical interest—one, dated 1653, a very good likeness of Queen Elizabeth which was probably sent to Sweden at the time when Erik XIV was paying such importunate court to her by proxy ("Tell your royal master that I have the heart, aye and courage too, of a man, not a woman," fumed Elizabeth in her absurd red wig as she sent the Swedish Ambassador packing at Richmond Palace after a particularly bold stratagem for her hand); and the strutting representation of Erik himself, returned only a few years ago to this Gripsholm collection from England.

There is a fine, sienna-brown study of the warted Cromwell, a typical Charles I by Vandyke, and a flashing Charles II by Lely—a mere handful to name from the two thousand.

But much else of interest is to be seen at Gripsholm besides these endless historical portraits; for the rooms are all furnished according to period, and, as Signe Bodorff says in his detailed monograph on the castle, "still give the impression of being inhabited."

On the lower floor the predominant style is Renaissance, with heavy sculptured cupboards and chests, magnificent woven tapestries, austere decorated chairs, and richly inlaid and painted ceilings. On the upper floor we find Baroque and Rococo with richly gilded ornamentation, handsome mirrors and inlaid and in many cases signed bureaux, tables (Haupt, Hultsten, Imreson, Garmer, etc.), beds and embroidered curtains of exquisite gold and silver brocade, Marieberg glazed-tile stoves, lovely Chinese hand-painted silk hangings. . . .

## UPPLAND—"CRADLE OF THE KINGDOM"

"The people are known for their industry, independence, and a certain stubbornness."

### CHAPTER XXIV

#### AT UPPSALA

*Tänka fritt är stort, Men tänka rätt är större.*

THORILD

THE RENOWNED SWEDISH UNIVERSITY city of Uppsala is less than an hour's train journey from Stockholm; but for some reason which I am unable to fathom ten years had elapsed from the time of my first visit to Sweden before I made it an objective. Neatly sprawled across the heart of the central Uppland plain, and a region of royal Svea rule and heathen worship from the earliest pagan times, Uppsala presents a charmingly pleasant aspect as the traveller emerges from the *central-stationen*. Trees, flower-beds, and green lawns meet the eye on all sides, with symmetrical streets beyond of high houses and buildings all with cream-coloured façades and brown window-guards.

The cheerful little Fyris river goes chattering along over rocks and stones on the very threshold of the town, through the main street Västragatan, where is to be found the chief hotel; while away beyond the swell of rooftops rises Castle hill, crowned by the immense Vasa *slott*, with Library hill near by with its surrounding Odinslund park—bearing a heathen name despite rechristening by the first Christian missionaries (who, by the way, were all English) "Mons Domini"—and the magnificent Cathedral whose soaring twin spires dominate the entire countryside just as do the towers of Chartres, which they closely resemble.

This similarity with the poignantly lovely French Gothic is not so fortuitous as might at first appear, for soon after the first church rose at Uppsala on this same site in 1273 a French monk, an architectural genius named Estienne, came from Paris with his head full of the designs of St. Louis's Saint-Chapelle; and the

direction thus given to the style of the new northern fane, the largest in Scandinavia and the Primatial Church of Sweden, was continued right through the fourteenth century, when it was completed much as we see it to-day; although extensive restoration was carried out in 1885.<sup>1</sup>

The interior is immensely imposing by reason of its length and height (the nave is 107 metres long, and the west tower 119 metres high), and beautifully light, as daylight and sunshine pour and stream down through the lengthy plain windows on either side. As I entered, the whole Cathedral was flooded with the periodic thunder and silvery fluting of the organ, for a christening was in progress, and I sat down on a stone pedestal just within the great main door to let the particular significance of the experience sink into my consciousness.

Presently the fine tenor voice of the officiating priest outsoared the organ-accompaniment in song and praise, to be followed by a sudden silence while a tiny bundle of wriggling flesh wailed ecstatically as it was sprinkled with baptismal water from the romanesque font. Before a door on the opposite side of the great nave two women were banking wreaths and masses of roses at the foot of a coffin raised on a trestle. The Cathedral was at that moment a compendium of human existence, symbolising the beginning and the end of life's pilgrimage.

I glanced across at a massive tombstone to the left, lying prone among other more worn memorials, and read with a sudden exhilaration of the mind the name carved thereon:

CARL VON LINNÉ

and remembered that his low-timbered eighteenth-century home, Sävja Manor, could still be seen at Hammarby, a few miles away ("Live well," he had written above the door in his study, "God sees you."). I returned my gaze to a chapel on the right hand and read on a large and ornate sarcophagus, also with a lifting of the spirit, another mighty name in Sweden's Pantheon:

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG.

<sup>1</sup> The architectural designs, an extremely interesting exhibit for laymen as well as architects, are now on permanent display in one of the upper galleries of the Cultural Museum in Stockholm.



The christening was over, and so I rose and walked slowly down the length of the nave, pausing before memorials, tombs and mortuary chapels. In the Finsta chancel were the parents of Saint Bridget, the Puisne Judge Birger Pedersson and his wife; and farther on the grave of Olof Rudbeck, the elder, author of *Atlantica* and presumably an ancestor of the Baron who had invited me at Sunne the previous summer to stay with him in Östergötland. Elsewhere were the family vaults of the great Oxenstierna line, and of the Stures, the Bjelkes, the Skyttes, the Mennanders and the Stenbocks; and, presently, a spacious and dignified chapel with the ornately carved monuments of John III and his Polish Queen, Katerina Jagellonika.

Then, at the very end, in the Lady Chapel beyond the high altar, I came to where Gustavus Vasa himself rests beneath a superb Renaissance marble monument of two of his three (but not co-regnant) Consorts, Katherine of Saxony-Lauenberg, and Margareta Leijonhuvud.

The great king had died during the Festival of St. Michael, on September 29, 1560, at the age of 64, after unequivocally affirming his Faith ("Then the clergyman knelt over the king and said: 'If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and hear my voice, give us some sign'; when, to the astonishment of all present, Gustavus exclaimed with a loud voice, 'Yes!'"—How one can hear in imagination that loud "Yaw!").

The Lady Chapel was filled with sun-tanned youths and girls in shorts who kept standing on the steps of the sarcophagus to look at the long beard of the recumbent figure, and then turning to examine the highly interesting and dramatic fresco wall paintings by J. G. Sandberg representing outstanding incidents in the life of the founder of the Vasa dynasty—Speaking to the Dalecarlians from the Churchyard wall at Mora—Threshing grain in Anders Pedersson's barn—Carrying the banner at the Battle of Bräunkyrka (when the Danes were routed)—Receiving the Swedish translation of the Bible from the hands of the Brothers Olaus and Laurentius Petri. The Petri brothers are, with Luther and Melancthon, commemorated as Sweden's "missionaries and apostles"; but this is unjust to the early missionaries to Sweden,

Ansgar and St. Sigurd of York; and of course to the holy and Catholic St. Eric himself, whose relics, with his twelfth-century crown, repose in a jewelled casket behind the high altar, constituting, as a local guide handsomely admits, "the most notable souvenir of the Cathedral".

In St. Eric's own church of the Holy Trinity, which reminded me of the Romanesque San Pedro de las Cardeñas at Gerona, a funeral service was proceeding when I looked in, doubtless for the defunct whose catafalque was banked with flowers in the Cathedral a few short steps away.

I now walked across to the majestic university building, beyond some charming gardens, and, after reading Thorild's celebrated lines inscribed in gold above the main portal to the effect that "to think freely is great, but to think rightly is greater", marched into the spacious Session Hall hung with full-length portraits of the kings from Gustavus to Oscar and climbed wide steps to the gallery where there are good copies of some of the more famous statues of antiquity, in which nothing was left to excite the imagination of either sex ("in Scandinavia," said a famous Danish writer artist in his studio in Badstuestrade, Copenhagen, "we think it disgraceful for a statue to *have* a fig-leaf"). In the Chancellor's room I paused to admire the sumptuous art cabinet presented by the city of Augsburg to Gustavus Adolphus when that most Protestant king was battling through Catholic Europe in defence of a new faith, and in another arrived just in time to surprise an immense and frantic yawn from a tortured *fröken* who was being conducted by her awe-inspired parents through innumerable chambers to admire the portraits of past Uppsala chancellors, of which there are about a hundred and fifty in that place. . . .

In the yard of the Castle there is a *klockstapel* with "Queen Gunilla's bell", whoever she was, and a fountain which spouts a rocket of water into the air for any would-be drinkers to quench their thirst. The afternoon being hot there was quite a queue of youngsters and elders when I got there, and great was their joy when a drinker missed the "rocket" and got his clothes sprayed for his lack of skill.

It was the time of the summer vacation and the University library, the famous *Carolina rediviva*, on the borders of the English Park, was most aggravatingly closed. This was a real disappointment, for among its 600,000 volumes, many brought back by Gustavus Adolphus from Riga, Braunsburg, Frauenberg, Würzburg and Mainz, was Uppsala's greatest treasure, the *Codex Argenteus*, Bishop Wulfila's fourth-century translation of the New Testament into "Meso-Gothic", the real Rosetta stone of the ancient Gothic world, for through it we have learned a whole lot from further translations of the incursions of the Goths into central Europe even before the fall of the Roman Empire, and of their wanderings as far as Spain.

Cheated of this treat—for after having examined the Book of Kells at Trinity College, Dublin, and the *Codex Sinaiticus* at the British Museum, a sight of the *Codex Argenteus* would have alone been worth a visit to Sweden—I took a late lunch in the pleasant and leafy garden of a University cafeteria, and then boarded the small bus for Old Uppsala, where the old pagans and Vikings had held whoopee and wassail in the early Middle Ages on returning laden with spoil and merchandise "from foreign parts".

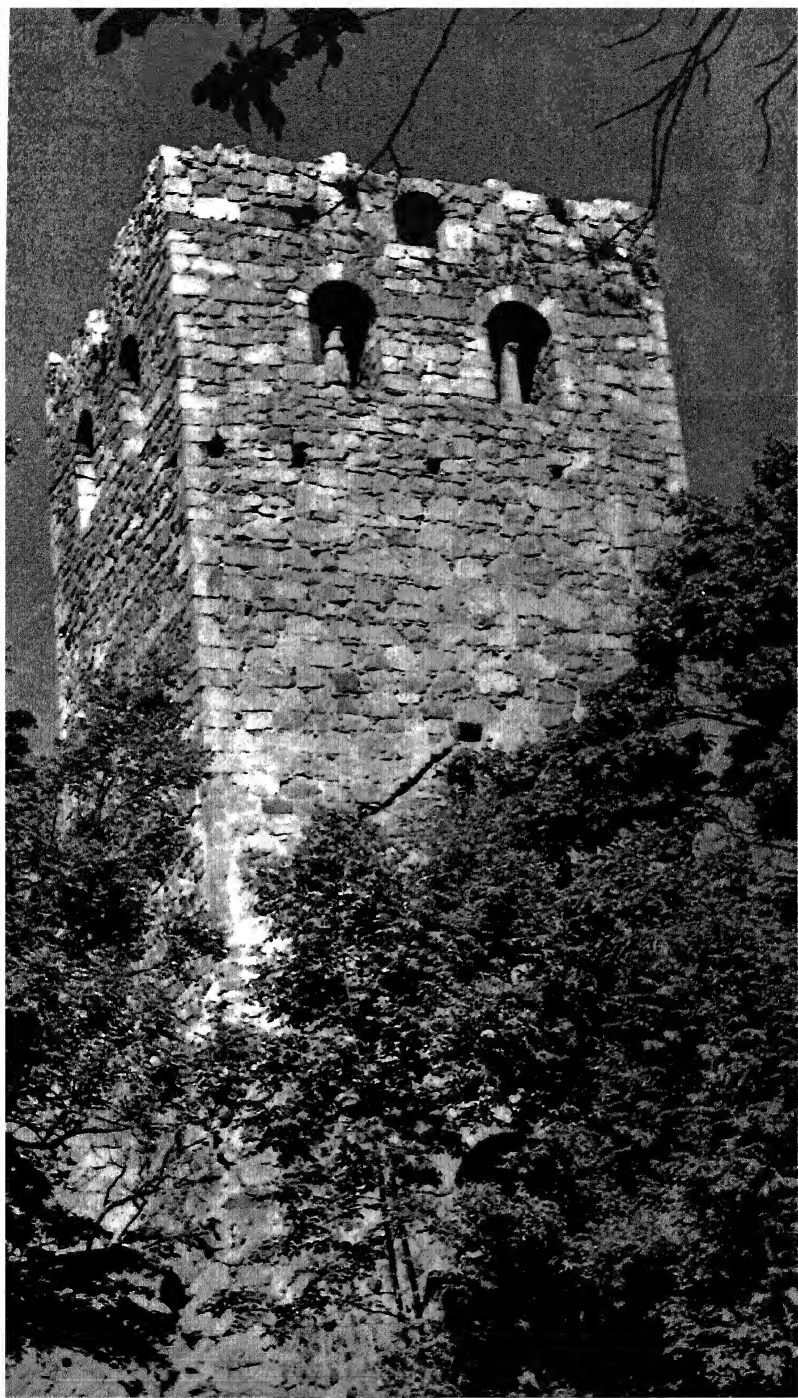
All were large-limbed, blue-eyed, and light-haired. . . . They spoke a language like rough German, and all had the same religion, believing in the great warlike gods Odin, Thor and Frey, worshipping them at stone altars, and expecting to live with them in the hall of heroes after death.

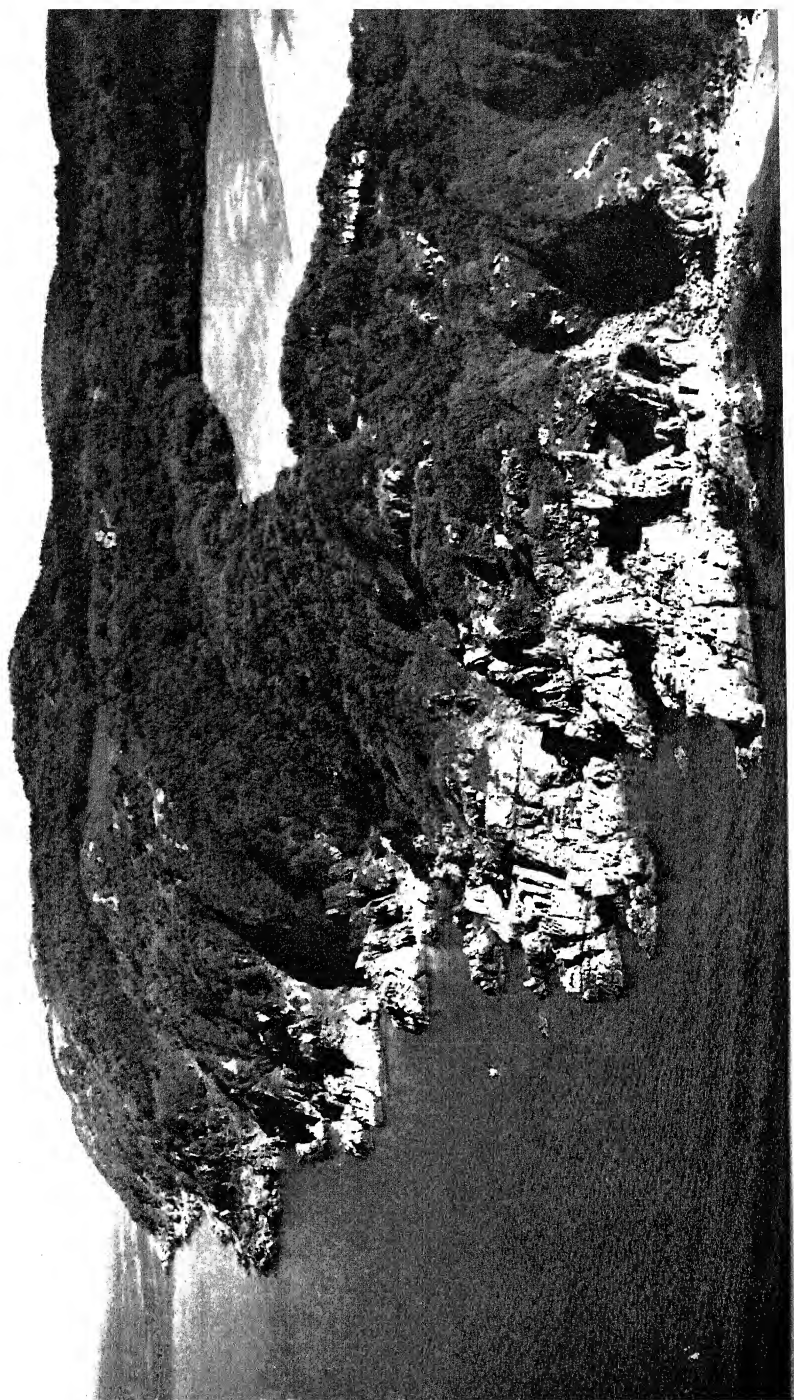
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#### AT OLD UPPSALA

The foundations of the great heathen temple where Odin,<sup>1</sup> Frey and Thor were worshipped for centuries and where human victims were sacrificed annually up to the tenth century of our era, are in actual fact still to be seen at Old Uppsala. All that is necessary for this excursion into the dark ages is to lift a plank in one of the pews of St. Mary's Church, which was built over the

<sup>1</sup> "All over Sweden men paid taxes to Odin; one pennig for every nose."  
Ynglinga Saga.





site, and then to descend a short flight of steps to a crypt lit by electricity. This I did soon after arrival and bumped my head on an overhanging plank as I emerged into daylight. Then I walked across to the modern Odensborg Inn, where one can imbibe the Viking *mjöd* (our Anglo-Saxon "mead") brewed from honey, which is served there in those great curved horn-cups such as the Vikings used. The mead at Old Uppsala was, however, a somewhat weak and watery substance compared to the brew served before the war in an unpretentious café opposite the central railway station at Munich, and much less evocative of pagan days.

On the ten-metre summit of the first of the three great tumuli which rise beside the church of St. Mary—the "pyramids" of ancient Svealand—a local guide was describing in laboured but passable French to a group of visitors from Paris the meaning and history of the great mounds. From the summit of either of them a splendid view is obtained right across the Uppland plain, where it is not difficult to visualise the Viking encampments, the bold horsemen coming in from distant communities, and the ancient farm-wagons threading their way along narrow meadow-tracks.

At the apex of this vast green tableland, this inland *meseta*, the spires of Uppsala Cathedral point skywards in a passion of yearning, drawing the gaze from any other objective with the force of a magnet.

I left the Frenchmen and walked over the tumuli, which are said to contain the calcined bones of the kings mentioned in *Beowulf*, and then returned by bus to Uppsala station, where I entrained for Märsta, *en route* to Sigtuna, the first Christian capital of Svealand. . . .

CHAPTER XXV  
IN TENTH-CENTURY SIGTUNA

*Thanne longen folk to gon on pilgrimage,  
And palmers for to seeken strangē strondēs.*

CHAUCER

CLIMBING INTO THE AFTERNOON train to Stockholm, I centered the first compartment and sat down in a corner-seat, just as I had done when boarding the Stockholm train at Åmål the previous June (Chapter IV). Hanging up my mackintosh, bought in Åmål, on the appropriate peg I glanced over at the opposite corner, where a rather thick-set man with spectacles was seated. I looked again—yes! there could be no mistake; it was in actual fact the friendly Norwegian inventor, formerly of Bristol, with whom I had conversed during the last stage of that memorable journey from the Dalsland capital.

“Well,” I exclaimed—“of all the extraordinary coincidences . . .”

“It means good luck,” he said, shaking hands; “this time you must come and visit me.” And he passed his card

G. N. Kirsebom

Dukvägen 33  
Riksby, Stockholm

and turned to where a smiling woman with two children, both fair, fresh and willowy, had been following every word with concentrated interest. “This is my wife,” said Mr. Kirsebom, “and this is Jon and this is Hilda. . . . You will come to see us soon, won’t you?” And I did. . . .

The train ambled slowly across the great Uppland plain, and soon arrived at the small station of Märsta, where I scrambled out to the cheery valedictions of my unexpected fellow-passengers. The Sigtuna bus was waiting outside the station and when a group of pretty Army *lottas* in grey uniforms had strapped their bicycles and bulky knapsacks outside and had climbed inside, we moved off on the six English miles' run to one of the most historic towns in all Sweden, a former capital of the ancient Svea kingdom whose foundation goes back at least to the year A.D. 900.

The gentle summer dusk was falling as the bus sped along a rough road, past towering masses of rock, undulating meadows and fields of waving corn. The sense of mystery and high adventure that always invades my spirit when approaching unknown territory now took possession of my consciousness, and I sat back absorbing the fresh beauties of sky and landscape and occasionally exchanging glances with the prettiest *lottas*, who smiled and chattered away in the adjacent seats.

Presently we entered a tree-lined thoroughfare affording far views of burgeoning tree-tops, of hoary grey church towers, and huddled ruins. On a far slope appeared a group of new buildings which I surmised must be the Hostel and Folkhögskola of the Lutheran "Sigtuna Foundation", founded in 1915 by the late Archbishop Nathan Söderblom and Manfred Björkquist, who was, in fact, seated in the "cloisters" as I walked up to the hostel, awaiting the arrival of a visiting English Divine and wife who were most reprehensibly late.

Students of many different nations live and study at the Sigtunastiftelsen, which has a residential college and a Humanistic School, State supported, and leading to the matriculation examination. Those whom I saw and talked to during this brief visit looked happy and healthy enough, including a remarkably beautiful Hungarian girl who had been rescued two years before from a concentration camp by the Swedish Red Cross and flown to Stockholm in a state of emaciated exhaustion. With her jet-black hair, piercing dark eyes, rounded and smiling cheeks, and gay summer frock she looked like a flower of old Sigtuna, or a



señorita from Andalusia, as she leaned over the balcony of the library bantering with a fellow-student from Jämtland, or airing her lovely English on me. . . .

Sigtuna, which succeeded the small island fortress of Birka as the royal capital of the Sveas (for plundering raiders from the Baltic had found their way to Birka, in the centre of Lake Malären), under their first Christian king, Olof Skötkonung, is one of the rarest sites in Scandinavia, where the veritable 'aura' of the early Middle Ages can be savoured to this day. It is a place of water-lapped, green solitudes, of silence and enchantment—like Ohinemutu, on Lake Rotorua, in far New Zealand. Strolling through the lanes the visitor stumbles upon haunted ruins and the amazing romanesque towers of tenth-century churches which stand in eloquent and majestic decay amid some of the richest flora in Sweden.

In the heaped churchyard of St. Pers (St. Peter's), with a tall square tower with Norman windows like St. Michael-at-the-North Gate in the Cornmarket at Oxford, I came upon a rune-stone commemorating an early Irish missionary:

IRIX - - X7X  
IRISH - - WS

*De Äre söner till Nyrver i rissue.* ("Thurbur raised this stone in memory of his brother.")

In Sigtuna there were coin-minters from Kent living and working under Olof Skötkonung (who, after his conversion, relapsed several times into heathenism and bloody pagan practices); and "the Apostle of the North" Nicholas Breakspear, Cardinal of Albano and afterwards Pope Adrian IV, through whose natal village of Abbot's Langley, in Hertfordshire, I have often walked, was here on a mission from Rome in 1152 as Papal Legate to the Synod of Sigtuna. That the Swedish tongue of those days could not have been difficult for visiting Englishmen to understand is proved by the fact that the reason assigned for the selection of

English missionaries to convert the heathen Svear was the similarity between the speech of the two nations! Indeed, it is locally reported to this day that when the English monk Adelsward preached at Sigtuna a thousand years ago "he was perfectly understood by the people".

Strolling alone at evening by the rush-bordered lakeside, with the waters of Mälaren spread out in grey-green emptiness to the green horizon, it was not difficult to visualise those English missionaries and minters jumping ashore here from the long lake-boats which had brought them from the fringes of the Baltic, and pacing these same shady walks at evening conversing amiably with the local inhabitants—although every trace of their sojourn at Sigtuna has long since vanished.

Not far from the little jetty where I finished my evening musings, "in a deep cove", was the seventeenth-century Manor of Steninge, which has a monument in its English park to that Count Axel von Fersen whose devotion to Marie Antoinette and heroic attempts to save her and Louis XVI and the young Dauphin by arranging the abortive flight to Varennes, has invested his memory with a halo of romance. Less than twenty years after the heads of Louis and Marie Antoinette had fallen beneath the guillotine in the Place de la Concorde, von Fersen himself was barbarously assassinated when leaving the Royal Palace in Stockholm; and the monument at Steninge commemorates the date.

Henri Bordeaux, in his delightful if discursive *Chateaux en Suède* is at great pains to prove after considerable research in France and Sweden that von Fersen, while the protector and adorer of the unhappy French Queen, was not in fact her lover; but close students of history and psychology hardly needed such a naïve assurance from the illustrious member of the French Academy. The passion of the handsome young Swedish aristocrat for the daughter of the Empress Theresa was of its very nature and the circumstances of the case romantic. But M. Bordeaux seems to have unearthed more dubious evidence regarding Fersen's other attachments in Paris prior to the Revolution. . . .

And so, unexpectedly, ends my chapter on Sigtuna.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### INTRODUCING THE SWEDES

*"No enemy has ever entered our central provinces."*

AT THE OPENING of the P.E.N. Congress in the Konserthus at Stockholm an address entitled "Introducing the Swedes" was read by the leading modern Swedish poet and historian, Sten Selander. It was of such wit and profundity that a more fitting pendant could scarcely be found to the preceding chapters on the "cradle of the kingdom". I shall therefore recapitulate the leading passages of this interpretation of the Swedish people by a native writer great enough to laugh at times at his own people, and regret that it is not also possible to reproduce at the same time the speaker's inimitable style and his fine "dolichocephalic" presence.

"A well-educated Swede (he said) is a most formal person. He cannot, for instance, speak to anybody without being introduced. My task is to introduce the Swedish people, so that from now on we may be on speaking terms with you, at least as far as our linguistic abilities go.

"National character is, of course, an ever-changing fiction. Like Hamlet's cloud, it is now almost in the shape of a camel, now like a weasel, now like a whale. The Swedes have changed a good deal since the olden times, when we made the round of Europe, murdering, committing rape and arson and generally behaving rather improperly. At present, we are as unlike the Vikings and Berserks as we can possibly be.

"Yet to understand a people, you must view them in the light of their past. In some respects, we and our environment are much the same as thousands of years ago. Since the end of the Ice Age Sweden has been inhabited by the same tall, dolichocephalic race; attributes which we share, by the way, with the Dinka negroes. It is probable, though, that Sweden was invaded by a foreign people round about the year 2000 B.C. But ever since that far-off

time we have been lacking in that mixing of races necessary to a stimulating intellectual cocktail; for four thousand years we have had to get on with the same old homebrew. As far as we know Sweden has never been conquered, and no enemy has ever entered our central provinces. The same kingdom has existed since the fifth century at least, which probably makes it the oldest State of this earth."

Selander emphasised that Sweden had always been a democracy, at least in a measure. There was, to be sure, he said, a certain difference between the parliamentary forms of ancient days, when the peasants expressed their displeasure by "throwing the king into the sea", and those of the present government through "committees and party bosses". But the foundation of Swedish democracy, a free peasantry, had, he added, never been quite obliterated.

"Our people is homogeneous all the way through (he continued). You will often find the keenest brains and the most aristocratic features among the working classes, and just now our literature is created chiefly by so-called proletarian authors. In the seventeenth century the peasantry was threatened with bond-service and loss of their freeholds through the rise of the nobility, whose towering mansions, furnished with the plunder of Prague and other cities of Central Europe, struck a foreign note in the Swedish landscape of forests, farmsteads, and small, white churches. Then, however, King Charles XI socialised the big estates by confiscating them; and through this royal revolution the peasantry was saved. The Crown has always been by far the greatest landowner of this country, and the State domains date back to heathen times. That is partly why we found it quite natural that the State owns the railways, the power stations, about half the timber forests, a share in many iron mines, and so on.

"We have been and still are a small people in a very large country. We may have lacked many things, but we have always possessed mileage in abundance. The smoke and dirt of overcrowded factory districts have not crippled our bodies and our souls; here everybody has access to green meadows and clear lakes. Even towards the end of last century the northern half of Sweden

was covered mainly by primeval forests. Far longer than in most European countries it has been more important with us to know the minds and habits of bears than those of men; and Nature is still our next-door neighbour. We did not leave the woods and move to town until yesterday. Only four hundred years ago Stockholm was peopled chiefly by Germans, and as late as in 1840 not one Swede out of ten lived in a town. In bygone days the people used to live in villages; the men could then discourse solemnly at the village assembly; the lads and lasses could gather for merry-making; and everybody had at least a modicum of social intercourse. About the year 1800, however, the old village communities were split up through the parcelling of the land, and the villagers moved out to remote farmsteads. This dispersal increased the solitude and isolation, resulting from the vastness of the country and the scarcity of its population, and made the Swedes still more unsociable, self-centred, and inclined to day-dreaming.

"Earlier, our backwoods-mentality was somewhat moderated by our habit of going on sight-seeing tours with Rollo, Gustavus Adolphus, and Charles XII. One of the momentous events of our history was the ceasing of these excursions, when King Charles made war upon the better part of Europe and, not surprisingly, was beaten hollow. We had played our starring part as a World Power with paradoxically inadequate means: during the Thirty Years' war Sweden *had a population of less than one million* (my italics). Now this strange interlude came to its spectacular end, and we retired, exhausted and impoverished, to the obscurity of our nook.

"We have never forgotten the lesson we learned on this occasion. Since then we have tried, more or less successfully, to have no foreign politics at all, and to make believe that the occurrences outside our boundaries do not concern us. One or two feeble attempts at playing our old games resulted in disastrous defeats; and of late we preferred more than once to lose face rather than engage in war. Fabulous luck and the situation of our country in a distant corner of Europe are, of course, the principal reasons why we have now enjoyed a hundred and thirty-two years of undisturbed peace. But our honest abhorrence of war must not

be quite forgotten either, even if, admittedly, love of peace comes more naturally to a small and powerless nation than to a great one."

Pressing home this last point, the speaker declared that no peasant had ever loved war, and then pulled the trigger with "Scratch a Swede and you will find a peasant".

"For centuries (Selander went on) the interchange between classes has been more lively with us than in most parts of Europe. Nearly every member of the upper middle class—say, a judge, a University professor, or a banker—has a grandfather who was a parson and a great-grandfather who was a farmer, and as often as not he has got a cousin who is still farming the paternal acres. The industrialisation and urbanisation of the country has, of course, caused great changes in this respect, too; but on the whole the contact between town and countryside is still unbroken. For instance, every Swede who can afford it has a summer house somewhere out of town, or else he spends part of the summer with friends or relations in the country. Now national character may surely be a fiction; but the existence of a particular peasant mentality, essentially the same in China as in America or Russia, is an undeniable fact. And our mentality is still in the main a rural one. It seems symbolical that 'a swede' is a sort of turnip."

The speaker then remarked that if his listeners had read some of the few Swedish books translated into English, they must have got rather a fantastic conception of what Swedes were like. They might have read Selma Lagerlöf with her "mad clergymen" and "mad cavaliers"; or Heidenstam's "King Charles' Men" with its "mad king"; or Strindberg "with his mad persons of every description". "As a matter of fact," Selander added, gazing upon us all with a whimsical smile, "we are not mad at all. On the contrary, like all peasants, we have got a little too much stolid, pedestrian common sense. We do not easily let our feelings get the better of our reason, partly because we have the rustic fear of behaving oddly, and partly because we want to see before acting which way the cat is going to jump. Very often a combination of shyness and *naïveté*, typical of the peasant, characterises our behaviour; and lack of fire and enthusiasm is our great weakness.

"But once we have made up our minds, moving us is a hard task indeed. We are all and sundry stiff-necked individualists, who do not like to kow-tow to anybody. A peasant is king of his domain, especially when there are no neighbours for two or three miles. This feeling runs in our blood, even if we have not any domains at all. At the same time we are affected with lots of inhibitions, as is usually the case with solitaries. We are self-conscious, shy, and painfully aware of our clumsiness and tongue-tie, as rustics are in genteel company. That is partly why we are as a rule a little too fond of the glass; and when we have had one over the eight we are inclined to talk big, thus making up for our customary shyness. When we want to be friendly and easy-going our self-consciousness is in the way, and we remain cold and formal. It stands in our way, too, when we are speaking a foreign language; we do not dare to try and get an idiomatic accent for fear of making fools of ourselves, and if we are not able to talk fluently, we falter and stutter and finally become quite dumb.

"Like most farmers, we take more interest in things than in men. Living for generations on out-of-the-way farmsteads has made us the world's worst psychologists. To a Swede you are either a damned fine fellow or a damned blackguard, and every attempt at a closer analysis is frequently regarded as nosey, or ridiculously high-brow, and always as bad form. This is one of the reasons why we are so poor at making conversation. On the other hand, a Swede becomes a genius as soon as he has to do with the interiors, not of men but of motors and machinery. If you have a break-down on a Swedish road, every man Jack of the neighbourhood will be present within ten minutes, explaining, arguing and trying to help you. And in another ten minutes you will be helped and the motor running again as smoothly as ever. This is easily understood: we have not had access to the village smith or other craftsmen; we have had perforce to be our own smiths, carpenters and Jacks-of-all-trades.

"Like every peasant ever born, we are materialists. This is not difficult to explain either. By means of patience, much hard labour, and the gift of organisation, we have forced our national

prosperity from a barren and stubborn soil. We are proud of our high standard of living, and rightly so: it implies something of a feat, and we do not want to lose it. This does not signify that we are mean. On the contrary, we like to have a good time and wish others to have it too; a Swede is the king of his domain also in the respect that his hospitality is royally lavish. We are good at making money, but better still at spending it; every other Swede lives above his income. In old times life was so hard and starvation such an everyday experience that we needed occasionally to have a glorious spread; and the habit still clings to us. Our materialism is that of a peasant, not that of a money-lender."

The speaker pointed out that the practical trend of the Swedish mind did not exclude a strong current of sentimentality. "From each landing stage in the skerries," he said in a vivid phrase, "you will hear on a calm summer evening the accordions pouring out their yearning tones; level-headed business men cannot make a speech without becoming pathetic and getting lumps in their throats; and after a drink or two, solicitors and real estate men grow wertherian and air the woes of their tragic, misunderstood lives. All this is rather comical, but not only so. Deep down in most Swedes there is hidden a real melancholy, akin to the tender sadness of our summer nights and the dreary monotony of our forests."

Selander then concluded his remarkable "interpretation" with a most eloquent defence of Swedish poesy. "No wonder then," he said, "that Swedish literature is dominated almost exclusively by the poets. Verse is, of course, everywhere the first literary form to be used, and our literature does not date farther back than to the end of the seventeenth century. For two hundred years, hardly anybody wrote anything but poetry; with one or two exceptions our earliest fiction of literary value was written as late as in the eighteen-twenties, and the serious Swedish drama began with Strindberg.

"The real explanation of the predominance of poetry must, however, be looked for in our temperament. Our deficient insight into character, our lack of psychological imagination, our self-centred disposition, our tendency to day-dreaming, our deep



feeling for nature, our fits of sentimentality, our melancholy, our *naïveté*—everything combines to make us poets and not novelists or playwrights. Except in England, you do not find anywhere in the western world a richer, a more manifold and full-voiced poetry than the Swedish one. I shall not tire you with an enumeration of poets with unpronounceable names, which you would immediately forget, although it is tempting to speak at least about some of them: about Bellman, the greatest lyric poet of the eighteenth-century, not only in Sweden but anywhere, whom his contemporaries called the Swedish Anacreon, though he could be called the Swedish François Villon with just as much right—or as little, because he is unique; or Tegnér, who can stand comparison with Schiller and at times even with Goethe; or Stagnelius, a sensualist and at the same time a gnostical mystic and ascetic, whose romantic poems glow with lustre of newly shed blood or dark rubies; or Fröding with his profound humour and his great, supremely beautiful visions; or several others. . . . I shall only express my firm belief that if these poets had written in one of the great languages, their names would have been household words among all lovers of poetry."

And the lyrical finale: "On the whole, the Swedes are not very exciting, even if hard-working and capable. Every time, however, that I returned from abroad, Sweden seemed an everyday paradise of sanity and order. The land exhaled a fragrance of birch leaves and pine resin; it glistened from clear lakes and clear eyes; and a free sky shone over everything that is friendly and familiar, as if a mist of hate and suspicion had suddenly lifted. We do not hate anybody, except those who have placed themselves outside humanity; and we do not meet foreigners with contempt or distrust; we look at them just as fellow-beings. This is, of course, nothing to boast of: we have less reason to hate than any other people in Europe. But if European culture is to survive, friendliness must vanquish hate. And I hope that you will take home from here the impression that hatred at any rate is foreign to our Swedish mentality. . . ."

A comprehensive echo from the lips of a modern Swedish poet of Voltaire's character-sketch of the Swede surreptitiously printed

at Rouen over a century and a half ago, in his *Histoire de Charles XII, Roi de Suède*:

The men are big, the serenity of the sky renders them healthy, the rigour of the climate invigorates them; they even live longer than other men, when they do not impair their health by the immoderate use of strong liquors and of the wines which the northern nations seem to love all the more since they are denied these things on account of soil and climatic conditions. The Swedes are well-built, robust, agile, capable of sustaining the most exacting labours, hunger and want; born fighters, full of arrogance, brave rather than industrious, having for long neglected and to this day practising ill the commerce, which alone could give that which is lacking to their country;

—except that the Swede has taken thoroughly to heart, and duly profited by, Voltaire's strictures on his ignorance of "the commerce"!

## SKÅNE AND HALLAND

### CHAPTER XXVII

#### DESCENT TO THE PLAINS

*No price is set on the lavish summer,  
June may be had by the poorest comer.*

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, *Prelude*

IN JUNE 1947 I was again present, by kind invitation of its charming and cultured Director, at the Årsmöte or annual gathering of the Swedish Tourist Traffic Association. The meeting, at which some two hundred delegates foregathered from all parts of Sweden, took place in Skåne, the southernmost province. The ordinary train on which I travelled from Stockholm arrived at Malmö after its six hundred miles' journey eight minutes before the scheduled time! We passed through Södermanland, Östergötland, and Småland, the largest of all the southern provinces, and the train made fairly lengthy stops at Linköping, the capital of Östergötland, which has a cathedral founded in 1150 with a central portal 15 metres in height—one of the most venerable and interesting architectural masterpieces in Sweden—and a famous statue in the Stortorget, or Big Square, of Folke Filbyter by Carl Milles; and, I think, Växjö, a cathedral town of ten thousand souls lying in the central part of Småland known as Varend and passing beautiful with many lakes, smiling landscapes and great forests, and with the unpretentious grave of one of Sweden's greatest poets, Esaias Tegnér, who was bishop here for the last twenty years of his life, from 1826 to 1846, and of whom a statue is to be seen in front of the cathedral.

On the second day of the Årsmöte there was an interesting coach drive from Malmö northwards along the Scanian coast and into Halland. The convoy started off at nine o'clock from the main square, only a short walk from the Tunneln hotel where a room had been reserved for me, and an hour later, after crossing

the completely flat and very un-Swedish plains that fringe the shore here, we were "cruising" through the high and leafy suburbs of Hälsingborg, which has fine wide streets, charming villas and blocks of modern flats, and shady woods of beech.

A halt of only a few minutes was provided for and then the alternative day-long tours were due to start off, one for Båstad, the ultra-fashionable resort half-way up the coast of Halland to Gothenburg, and the Kullaberg tour, both leaving from the eleventh-century defence tower Kärnan, which stands on a grassy hillock behind the centre of the town and from the summit of which majestic views are obtained over Skåne, the Kattegat, and Denmark, which lies only twenty minutes away by ferry steamer; indeed the outlines of the magnificent castle of Kronborg, Hamlet's Elsinore, is clearly discerned with the naked eye.

As I had climbed the previous year to the highest gun platform of Kärnan—beneath which recent excavations have brought to light a fine medieval glass chalice of Syrian design, the most perfect find of its type in the country—I ran down terrace steps into Järnvägsgatan to cash my last travellers' cheque, for the credit I had brought from London was now almost exhausted, and only Fate knew how I should manage for the remainder of my stay in the "Springtime Land". The cheque was a small one, and the foreign exchange official in the Svenska Handelsbanken branch where I presented it smiled broadly when I told him the news. He then wrote rapidly on an advice note or something which he passed over for initialling to a neighbouring desk; and then waved me over to the cashier to accept payment in Swedish currency. Time was getting short, and the coaches were waiting to continue their journey. But there is never any unavoidable delay in Swedish banks or business houses, however slow waitresses may be in the restaurants, and a moment later I was handed over the triplicate copy of the advice bill containing the notes, which seemed curiously bulky considering the smallness of the cheque.

I paused, uncertain whether to verify the amount there and then, or to do so later in the coach; but further hesitation was cut short when one of the Association officers, a dark young man speaking five languages, came vaulting down the steps to say that the

entire cavalcade was held up awaiting my return. So pushing the notes into my coat pocket I followed him back to Kärnan and leapt into the first Kullaberg coach as the driver was revving up the motor. . . .

The coach road north of Hälsingborg is entrancingly leafy, and bordered by neat villas and cottages, for many Stockholm families and parties from the smaller southern cities come to this salubrious coast to pass the summer months. We skirted Sofiero, the summer home of the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, and then drove through Ångelholm and Mölle, each strongly recalling by the uniform design of their houses Danish resorts on the opposite shore—which is not surprising considering that Skåne was wholly Danish until as late as three centuries ago. The province was, in fact, liberated in 1658 by Charles X and his hard-pressed armies by a famous march in mid-winter across the frozen Öresund, the Swedish king dictating surrender terms in the heart of Copenhagen which compelled the cession to Sweden of the provinces of Skåne, Halland, Blekinge and Bohuslän.<sup>1</sup> Denmark made two determined attempts to recover Sweden's rich southern province, which from Roman times has given its name to the whole of Scandinavia, but on each occasion the Danish arms were repulsed, the last time decisively in a battle fought just outside Hälsingborg, where a Scanian army led by General Magnus Stenbock, whose equestrian statue by the sculptor Börjeson adorns the main square, administered a crushing defeat.

A halt at Mölle, where mixed bathing was first introduced into Sweden (and the hullabaloo it caused is still spoken of by the oldest inhabitants) to admire the picturesque port and coastal scenery provided an opportunity to examine the kronor notes handed to me by the Hälsingborg bank in exchange for my last

<sup>1</sup> "Skåne belonged to Denmark until 1658. Sweden was at war with Russia, Poland and Austria when Denmark's declaration of war was made in 1657. The Swedish king, Charles X, had his main body of troops in Poland when the news of Denmark having joined his enemies reached him. He hurried through Germany and in January 1658 marched across the frozen sea to the Danish islands, a feat without a parallel in the history of war, more daring in many ways than Hannibal's march across the Alps." *Bonnier's Guide to Sweden*, p. 169.

travellers' cheque; and so I extracted the packet from my pocket and gazed incredulously at its contents. For instead of a sum totalling somewhat under thirty kronor (with the exchange at 16.60 to the pound) I was in possession of notes to the value of 289 kronor! Was this, then, I wondered, what the broad smile of the foreign exchange official had portended? Hospitality and goodwill to the stranger are so much a matter of course in Sweden, that it was not impossible to believe that the bank official, realising my dilemma, had authorised the issue of the equivalent of £20 instead of the £2 clearly printed on the travellers' cheque. But a visit to the branch at Malmö two days later revealed that the over-issue was accidental and not, in this instance, the fruit of benevolence and fraternal goodwill, and the balance was in due course refunded from London with the concurrence of the Bank of England (which "never makes a mistake"). But in the meantime I was safe for some time ahead. . . .

Skåne, as I have said, is flat as a pancake except in the north, where there are some hills and many fine forests; and although it is the celebrated granary of Sweden, as Egypt was of Rome—for the practice of agriculture in the province dates back at least five thousand years—this does not compensate in the eyes of some of its inhabitants for the absence of mountains. There is a popular story, about a boy from Skåne on a visit to Jämtland who was informed on arrival by his host that he would be shown next morning "real mountains, which you do not have in Skåne, I believe". "No," he proudly retorted, "but if we did our mountains would be both bigger and better than any you've got here!"

Skåne is also famous for its collection of castles and big manorial houses, again the result of centuries of Danish suzerainty; and in fact many of the most beautiful castles in all Scandinavia are found there. One summer evening during a call at Malmö on a pre-war visit to Sweden I had been driven by a son of my Näsby hostess who lived near Lund to see one of the finest of them, Torup's *slott*, and I had long remembered its massive symmetrical red walls covered with scarlet creeper and

ivy, and its fine lawns and flower-beds all aflame under the northern light.

On this Kullaberg journey we passed another ancient and celebrated castle, surrounded by a park of great luxuriance, Krapperup, belonging to the Gyllenstierna family (the Gildensterns of Hamlet), whose history dates naturally from the Middle Ages.

Of Kullaberg itself, where we lunched in a delightful restaurant overlooking cliffs and sea, no words of mine could equal the poetic description from a local guide:

The *Kullaberg* is a wedge-shaped mountain, 16 km. in length and 200 m. in height. The ridge is clad with fragrant coniferous trees and splendid beech forests which, towards the south, reach down to the shore. Fertile fields, well-built farmsteads and ancient stately country seats lying imbedded in the richest verdure, frame the slopes of the ridges and stretch down towards the great green meadows which fade into the far horizon. Around the mountain promontory lies the limitless, deep blue sea (this passage might have come straight from *The Odyssey*!). The great international waterway to the Baltic passes close to the promontory's outermost point. A lighthouse stands on the very spot where the first lighthouse in Scandinavia was erected in 1560. Towards the north and north-west the mountain forms a precipitous cliff about 100 m. in height reaching right down into the sea. The numerous caves, which owe their existence to erosion, thrust themselves deep into the mountain sides. In pre-historic times they were inhabited by cave-dwellers. *Kullaberg* is also of great interest geologically; but the flora of the mountain, which has here evolved the rarest specimens of its richest creative power, is of still greater interest. . . .

What a spread met our hungry gaze as we entered the spacious restaurant at Kullaberg, into which the daylight streamed through plate-glass windows overlooking the coast and the Sound! Just within the main doors an immense table was literally loaded with smörgåsbord, sixty dishes in all as I learned on precise enquiry. There were all the usual varieties of fish, egg dishes, raw and cooked vegetables, cheese, real butter, mayonnaise, and the delicious *lingon* or whortleberry sauce which is served in combination with many

of the heavier meat dishes. I remarked that I should like to paint the ensemble of dishes, with their brilliant colouring; but neighbours declared: "There is too much food; really it is not allowed under our new regulations. They have put it on specially for the Arsmöte delegates." An excellent small orchestra played during the meal, and a really intelligent song about Skåne was sung by the leader, who had an attractive, wistful voice.

We saw Hógarnås that day, one of the few coal-mining centres in the country, but where, however, the industry is insufficient in itself to maintain the six thousand odd inhabitants and is combined with earthenware manufacture and associated industries.

In the evening a banquet was given at Ramlösa Park, a few kilometres outside Hälsingborg, which, with its chalybeate and alkaline springs, was opened as a spa as far back as 1707. Acres of lovely lawns and gardens surround the hotel, which specially caters for the aged and infirm and for those in search of mental quiet. The meal was spread over a couple of hours by the inveterate Swedish custom of smoking in between the courses and by speeches, the inevitable concomitant at such gatherings. One of the speeches, a witty and forthright discourse by the youthful director of Danish Tourism (translated, fragmentarily, by my right-hand neighbour at table) set everyone in a roar. A number of excellent wines induced a mood of geniality, and for coffee and liqueurs we repaired to the ballroom where, after a lecture of paralysing ponderousness on the history of Hälsingborg by a local worthy, a decorous dance followed until midnight, when we found our way back in groups by taxi to our respective hotels; and the next morning after early breakfast crossed over to Denmark for a day's tour of the Frederiksborg and Fredensborg palaces and Copenhagen.

But my brightest memory of Hälsingborg is still that of a teen-age girl I had seen the previous year tripping across the beautiful avenue of Hälsovägen and into the stationery shop where I was buying postcards from her mother, her fresh features glowing with the natural joy and radiance of girlhood, and her steps seeming to pass, light as a feather, over the prostrate earth. Every movement, every glance from her star-clear eyes, praised the Lord and Giver of life. . . .



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### AT MALMÖ, LUND AND FALSTERBO

*It is maintained by some that travel has no educational value, that a person with sensibility can gain as rich an experience of life by staying right where he is as by wandering around the world, and that a person with no sensibility may as well remain at home anyway. To me this is nonsense . . .*

RICHARD HILLARY, *The Last Enemy*, p. 19

A GOOD DEAL MORE could be said about Malmö than I have so far written of it; and the same applies to Gothenburg. But Sweden, whose length from top to toe is 978 miles (the distance from Newcastle to Madrid) is a big country to write a book about, and the usual information on the cities is always at hand. Malmö is a clean and bright city of some 125,000 inhabitants. Three interesting facts about it are: that it rises on a bay of the Öresund and is only one hour and a half by ferry from the heart of Copenhagen (unless you count the Rådhusplatsen as the centre, and not the Hotel d'Angleterre, in which case make it three-quarters of an hour); that it has the oldest club in the world in St. Canute's *gille*, founded in the twelfth century and of which most of the kings who have ruled over Skåne were members; and that Mary Stuart's third husband, the Earl of Bothwell, was a prisoner here in Malmö castle from 1567 to 1573, although why precisely he came to be incarcerated in Skåne is one of the mysteries of history.

The fourteenth-century St. Petri church is a fine specimen of northern Gothic, and the Town Hall, built in 1546, is not a bad piece of Dutch Renaissance.

But what takes my eye most when I am in Malmö are the shops, which are worthy of the Rue de la Paix, and the harbour, where there is always some interesting shipping to be seen. And on summer nights the brilliant sky effects, and the translucent light in which the city is bathed, are something which long remain in the memory. . . .

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From Malmö station Lund, the second University city in Sweden, is reached in under thirty minutes across a great alluvial plain. Lund, which still retains an atmosphere of medieval ease and serenity in the midst of much industrial and agricultural activity, actually takes its name from London, which is a highly interesting historical fact. For the city was founded by our own King Canute ("Knut den store" in Sweden) who reigned over England, Denmark and southern Sweden (then Danish territory), and whose arbitrary and unsuccessful attempt to keep the waves of the English Channel in their place—at Bosham, I suppose, where the tomb of his daughter may be seen outside the church—is our favourite item of schoolboy knowledge.

King Canute named the new London *Lundinium Gothorum* and the foundations of its massive and magnificent Cathedral, the finest example of pure Romanesque in the north, were laid within a century of his death by "Canute the Saint".<sup>1</sup>

By an extraordinary coincidence, when I entered the Cathedral a christening was again taking place at the medieval font while a coffin was being loaded with flowers in the nave, just as in Uppsala Cathedral; and likewise the high and glorious interior was reverberating to the thunder of organ music and the pure tenor of the presiding priest calling down heaven's blessings on the puling infant in his arms,<sup>2</sup> just as had the majestic Gothic nave at Uppsala. Birth and death, death and birth, the systole and diastole of mortal existence was in both great fanes symbolised in an appropriate setting, with eternity for background.

For fifteen minutes I sat looking at the celebrated astronomical

<sup>1</sup> "Below an elegant palmetto frieze the bowl (A.D. 1180) has a Latin inscription recording that 'Alexander made me'. . . . The ornament is English while the material comes from Scania, the southern part of Sweden, once a Danish province. Alexander was an Englishman employed in Denmark, probably on the Cathedral building at Lund." *Catalogue of Danish Art Treasures*, London, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> "The rite of baptism was held in the highest regard by the early Swedish Church, and elaborate rules were drawn up for its most solemn administration. It was considered of great importance that fresh water should be used. The wells, in crypts like those of Dalby and Lund, were held in great esteem, as the water therein did not freeze. . . . Salt was an essential to the baptismal ceremony, and some early fonts were provided with a salt-cellar carved at the foot." *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1891.

clock, the *horologium mirabile Lundense*, constructed in 1380, which shows, in addition to the usual hours, the day and date, month and year, and the transit of sun, moon and stars, as years before I had stood waiting for the figures to move and the chimes to sound of the similar massive and intricate medieval timepiece in Strasbourg Cathedral. At Lund the chimes did not sound, while I was there at least, so I mused in silence on the single Faith that had once held ground from Lund to Lisbon and from Strasbourg to Civita Vecchia, and on the medieval love of marvels.

The extensive University, however, founded six centuries later, and not the Cathedral is to-day Lund's *cor cordium* and all the life of the town revolves around its alumni and activities. The Library alone contains some 310,000 volumes, with 7000 manuscript volumes in addition. Among many famous Swedes who have held chairs at Lund University were C. A. Hagberg, the translator of Shakespeare into Swedish, Linnaeus's teacher Stobaeus, and of course Esaias Tegnér, whose former home in the St. Gråbrödersgatan was willingly opened up for me by a tall and charming assistant from Lindstedt's University bookshop at the corner, who pointed out the original furniture, including the desk on which *Frithiof's Saga* was written and the primitive kitchen midden where Tegnér's bread was baked. In this house the poet had lived from 1813 to 1826, and here he was visited by Longfellow, who later made a translation of the Saga which greatly pleased its author.

My next objective was an unpretentious-looking house only a short walk away in St. Södergatan (Number 22). I stood outside it for so long gazing up in the sunshine at the stone plaque and inscription above the lintel that boys gathered around, and passers by gazed back to see what all the fuss was about. But I was oblivious to their curiosity, for in imagination I was seeing a tall man with a small head, wearing a tricorne hat, long cut-away surcoat and hip-high riding boots, striding through the low doorway after an absence from his kingdom of fifteen years, during which he had gained the fabulous victory of Narva, suffered disastrous defeat at Poltava, endured long and incredible imprisonment by the Turks, and finally, after legendary escape and a lone

ride through hostile territory of a thousand miles from Bender to Stralsund, had landed at Ystad and come on to Lund to plan a campaign against the Danes, who had once more declared war on Sweden!

The simple inscription read:

KONUNG CARL XII

HADE HÄR SITT HOGOVARTER 1716-1718

which offered no difficulty at all—"King Charles XII had here his headquarters, 1716-1718." . . .

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Falsterbo (with Skanör), formerly the most fashionable bathing resort in the country before Båstad sprang into such fame and favour, rises on a sandy foreshore at the southernmost extremity of Sweden. There, one morning before the second World War to end world wars, I found myself swimming from the pleasant dunes in the green waters of the Öresund and lying flat on my back in the sand gazing into the blue infinitudes of the summer sky.

Later in the day, in the flower-decked gardens of a villa which stood opposite a lighthouse, I was hospitably received by Hr. Anders Österling, the Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, a famous critic and poet and member of that august body which selects each year the Nobel Prize-winner for Literature. We talked of travel and books, and he led me into his study and showed me where the swallows had made nests in the ceiling. He said hospitably, "You must come again," but I went on that year to Trelleborg and took the ferry across to Sassnitz, and so returned through Berlin, Munich, Passau, down the Danube to Vienna and Budapest, and on to Bucharest and Constanza, to Istanbul, Beirut, and Athens, Haifa and Alexandria to Cairo, and I have not found myself since among the holiday dunes and deeps of "farthest south" Falsterbo.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### INTERLUDE AT FALKENBERG

*Sensitive to beauty, he can never see a pretty face without being smitten.*

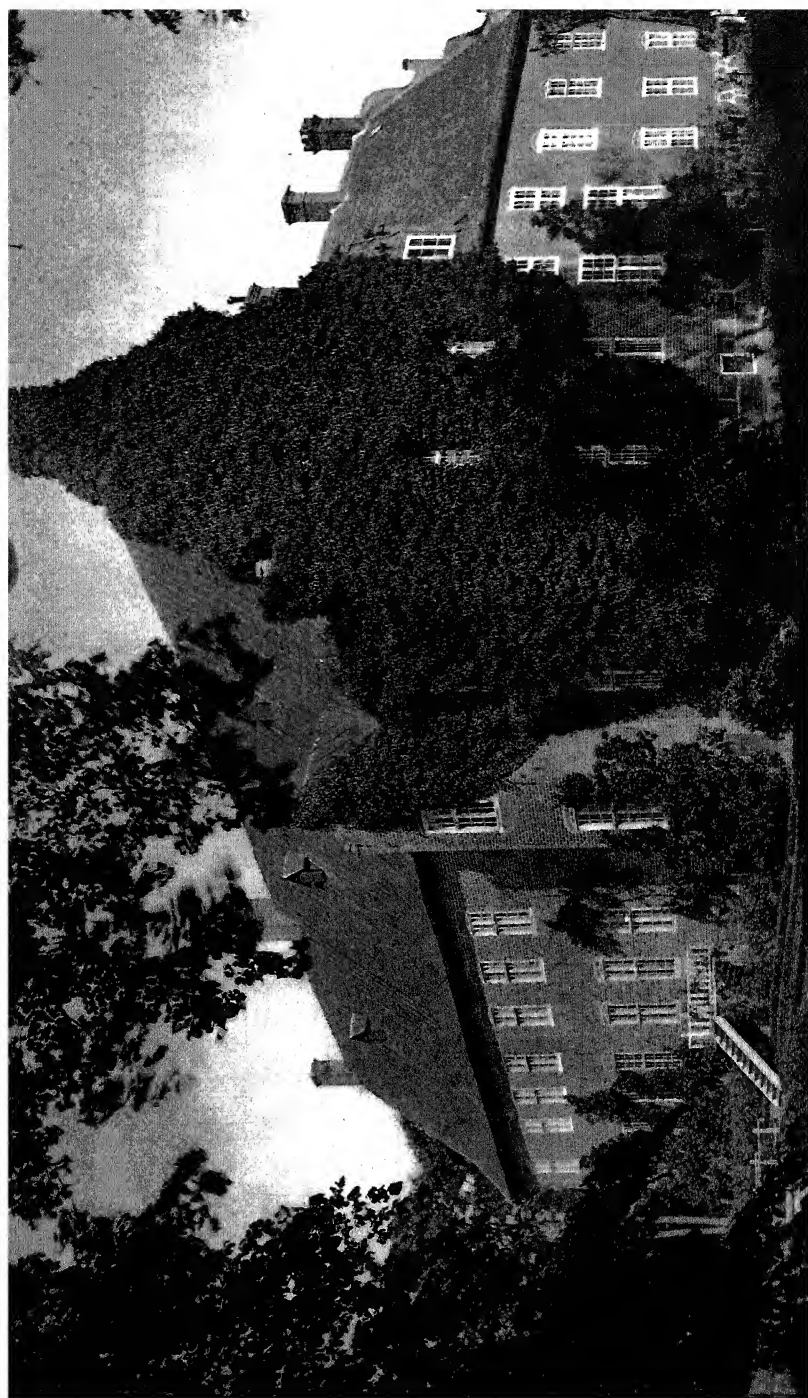
ROMAIN ROLLAND, *Beethoven*, p. 51

BLEKINGE, IN THE SOUTH-WEST, "the garden of Sweden", is a province I have not explored, but if my friend Hr. Åke Pressner is typical of its inhabitants then Blekinge, where it is said that the handsomest women in Sweden are to be found, is a province not to be missed.

It was soon after the Malmö-Göteborg train had pulled out of Teckomatorp station, after running along the Öresund shore to Lomma, that a tall and broad young man, hatless and wearing a well-cut grey suit with bow-tie, entered the compartment in which I was travelling and politely enquired if he might take the opposite seat. He was a splendid specimen of manhood in a land of tall and handsome males, a combination of an Earl Mountbatten—in whose doings he later evinced a lively interest—and a Robert Montgomery.

The new arrival gave a friendly quiz from clear direct eyes behind pince-nez, and soon we were conversing like old acquaintances, for he spoke English well and without hesitation. Although born in Blekinge he had his business in Lund, he said, and would shortly visit London for a few days. As we passed through Svalöv, the station for the Swedish Seed Society's far-famed seed culture, which I had visited in 1936, and approached Åstorp, Åke explained that he was on his way to spend a brief holiday with a married sister and her soldier-husband at Falkenberg, a popular Halland resort a few stations beyond Båstad, the most fashionable resort of all along this delectable shore. "My sister has travelled and knows the Pacific," he added, "she would be interested to meet you. Why not leave the train with me and stay until to-morrow evening. There is good swimming and a fine sandy





foreshore at Falkenberg, and this evening we shall dine and dance at the *Bade-restaurant*."

The invitation was tempting, with its promise of a new adventure. Such chance encounters have significance in the flux of time, for it was from just such a fortuitous meeting at Ceuta, Spanish Morocco, in 1933, that I was enabled to wander over the entire Mediterranean, Central Europe, Egypt, Tunisia, Greece, Crete, Palestine, and Syria, to the Bosphorus. I was actually on my way to Nääs on this occasion for the Midsummer festival, but it would be simple enough to telephone from Falkenberg to the *Stiftelse* to advise that my arrival would be delayed twenty-four hours.

"It is very kind of you," I said; "I will think about it for a few moments."

We now drew into Ångelholm, lying on the Rönneå river, and according to the African explorer Du Chaillu, the veritable region from where the Angles sailed in the eighth century to colonise "Angle-land", England—a theory which finds considerable support in Bedboe's important work, *The Races of Great Britain*, but which is nevertheless nonsense. Here a distinguished-looking trio appeared, mother, father and daughter, the mother tall, with a smiling and benign expression, her husband obviously a military man, a colonel perhaps, stern-looking at first but soon melting into a more genial mood under the genuine sweetness of his womenfolk.

The daughter, whom Åke opined later was "about eighteen", was very pretty and had her mother's radiant smile. She sat between mamma and Åke for some distance, but then gave a squirm and a wriggle at the upturned arm-rest, which was incommoving her back. My new friend sprang up at once and stood by the compartment door, motioning the elegantly dressed girl to occupy his corner-seat, which she did with a "*Tak-tak*" and one of her delicious smiles. Borrowing needle and thread from her mother's handbag she concentrated for the next few minutes on mending a hole in one of the fingers of her black lace-net gloves, without removing them.

In due course we reached Båstad, that elegant and expensive



watering-place to which the amazing King Gustaf still resorts each year to play tennis and relax from affairs of state, and where the July competitions for the Golf championships are held annually. Båstad with its remarkably mild climate, fine scenery and magnificent vegetation, whose church dates from 1480 and where there is a celebrated hotel, Skånegården, built in the semblance of a monastery and luxuriously run by a grand-nephew of Alfred Nobel. And it was at Båstad that the distinguished trio left us, after more smiles and polite thanks.

"She is rare," said Åke quietly, as they descended on to the platform (only he pronounced it "rar"). And indeed, as the fröken stood there on the platform beside her tall and charming mother, while father went in quest of a porter for the luggage, she looked as dainty as a Dresden shepherdess.

"She is looking at us," said Åke again, and impulsively I stood up and leaning out of the window beckoned her to come nearer, which she did.

"Come back," I said, "we miss you."

She smiled up as the train started to move and said, "Another time, perhaps."

Mother and daughter waved back as father, with a porter in train and smiling broadly, led his sportive womenfolk majestically down Båstad arrival platform.

Laholm, idyllically situated on the river Lagan, where there is good salmon-fishing, and Halmstad, with a population of 20,000 and a fifteenth-century castle in which the governor of the Halland province resides, were in turn approached and passed—and then came Falkenberg!

"I will come," I said, grabbing my cases as Åke stood up and leaned half of himself out of the window. A minute later we were both on the platform shaking hands with his sister, wearing slacks and shorter by a foot than her handsome brother, and another tall and clean-cut man whom she introduced as her husband, Captain D—, dressed in summer shirt and shorts. There was a third member of the welcoming party, a Chinese attaché from the Legation in Stockholm who it transpired later had walked during the Sino-Japanese war a distance equivalent to that from Stockholm

## INTERLUDE AT FALKENBERG

to Paris with two companions to escape from the advancing enemy. His companions had died in his arms.

Falkenberg has a sandy foreshore some three miles long, and in the evening the sea, which is shallow there for a considerable way out, looks like a vast floor of burnished copper.

We swam, and then proceeded to the crowded *Bade*-restaurant for dinner and dancing. And an hour before midnight, after bidding our Chinese friend good night, we returned to the beach hut where a couch had been made up for me against one side. Åke, having changed outside into pyjamas, snuggled down in his blankets on the opposite side, while his sister occupied a home-made sleeping bag between us, and her husband stretched himself on the settee at the back facing the open porch, the dunes and the sea.

"We call this a family bed," laughed Åke's sister, then quickly added, as if to remove any misunderstanding, "but we don't always live like this, you know. I should like you to visit us in our home at Skövde. Good night, and sleep well."

It was in truth enchanting to wake in the early dawn and watch the morning light rise over the dunes and the sea; to inhale the fresh sea air and to listen to the gentle and regular breathing of the other sleepers—there was something almost holy in the sound!—and to see resting on a pillow not two feet away from my couch the curly head of a blissfully sleeping young woman of whose existence twenty-four hours earlier I had been totally unaware! This was Scandinavia.

We all lent a hand preparing breakfast, at which the Chinese Legation attaché appeared, having already enjoyed a cycle run of ten miles in the early sunshine.

The same sunshine enticed us all out when breakfast was over, first to swim and then to cycle round the neighbouring countryside (for a Swedish-made Monark machine had been produced for my use from nowhere), returning an hour later along the foreshore below the dunes. People were lying in the sun, making the most of the short northern summer, and in one sandy hollow I passed a man and woman lying side by side face downwards, with the

sunshine streaming across their bodies. Adam, who was fully dressed, buried his face in the sand like males the world over, as unadorned Eve, the sculptural contours of whose honey-like skin glowed marvellously against the golden sand, looked unwaveringly, if somewhat severely, into my eyes as I pedalled by. If I had not been nervous of falling off the bicycle (which I did automatically a few moments later, on reaching the sea-line!) I would Whitman-like have blown her a kiss.

What an appetising *Middag* was served in the hut from packets, boxes and tins, and how enjoyable was the game of Bridge afterwards, with the ever-amiable Chinese attaché gazing on over our shoulders!

In the afternoon I swam again from the end of the jetty where a youthful octogenarian was somersaulting backwards into the clear cold water, and fresh and willowy frökens were donning violent-coloured dressing-gowns after their dip.

And in the evening I rode back to the station with Åke and his sister, re-crossing the ancient stone bridge with five arches, unique in all Sweden, passing the salmon fisheries whose lease is sold every morning by the town council—"sometimes to an Englishman"—at "lax-auktion", and the old inn at Vilan.

"Good-bye; write to us."

Good-bye, good-bye, kind and good hosts of Falkenberg; may my right hand forget her cunning if I remember not thee!

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The following summer I was so fortunate as to enjoy, with my wife and son, a stay of several days at Skånegården by the most generous invitation of its charming director, Dr. Olaf Nobél. At this magnificent hotel, famous throughout Sweden and far beyond its confines, guests may savour the veritable essence of peace

*While all the flowers and trees do close  
To weave the garlands of Repose,*

in circumstances of the utmost comfort and homeliness. It seems a terrible waste that holidaymakers should seek it out only during the short summer months; and that it should be closed for the

## INTERLUDE AT FALKENBERG

remainder of the year when it might serve as an ideal rest or convalescent home.

One of the receptionists, Fröken Geijer, granddaughter of the Värmland poet, sent me off one morning on a visit to the Norviken Gardens, some four kilometres from Båstad, where a former tract of wasteland has been transformed into a Hesperidean paradise by the devoted labours over thirty years of Hr. Abelin, now an octogenarian who nevertheless still travels unaccompanied about Sweden to those who seek his expert advice on laying out their garden-estates.

As soon as I came in sight walking up the long drive the Union Jack was hoisted on a soaring flag-pole by one of the botanical pupils! I climbed the wooded hill-side after being shown over the luxuriant Japanese and Italian gardens by an enthusiastic summer guide, and sat down on an artificial seat to admire the blue Kattegat creaming along the shore far below and beyond the trees and flower-beds, and scribbled some lines, which closed with the couplet:

*I dream of Greece and sense the aim of sight,  
To flee the world's despair to Nature's light!*

## IN VÄSTERGÖTLAND AGAIN

### CHAPTER XXX

#### HIGH MIDSUMMER

*I really believed in Apollo and in beauty being the only thing that matters. . . . God made the world beautiful and it is only the senseless idiocy of human beings that has reduced it to what it is now, a scrapheap.*

VIOLET GRANT DUFF, *A Victorian Childhood*, p. 46

SOME SEVEN SWEDISH and forty-two English miles (for a Swedish "mile" is six English miles) from Gothenburg there lies one of the most idyllic tracts of countryside in all Västergötland—a region of small, exquisite lakes, sloping meadows decked with wildflowers, and woods rising on far horizons. The nearest railhead is Floda (pronounced "Flewdah"), from where a taxi conveys visitors the five or six kilometres to the famous handicrafts and folk-music and dancing school of Nääs, which, between the wars, attracted adult students and interested visitors from all over the world.

Nääs comprises an estate of some two hundred acres containing scattered groups of yellow-timbered buildings constructed for the most part about a century ago, a *slott* or large manor house once occupied by the original owner and his family, a Jewish textile factory proprietor named Abrahamson who bequeathed the estate in perpetuity as a centre for the conservation and teaching of the old Swedish handicrafts and the spirited people's dances as danced from time immemorial in the Swedish provinces by teams dressed in the multi-coloured National costumes of the various regions, and indeed, up to a century ago, the daily dress of their Arcadian inhabitants, but now only worn for such special occasions as Midsummer.

Nääs constitutes one of the adult high schools, the only really popular schools in Sweden to-day, where the education is on a less rigid and unelastic basis and where young men and women,

and especially school-teachers, may repair from May to October to take courses in metal or wood handicrafts, in folk-music, folk-dancing, or choral singing.

To Nääs then I went two years running for the great *Midsommar-fest*, the second time being accommodated in the *slott*, when I found myself to be the sole occupant of the enormous mansion, filled with the bad art and heavy Empire furniture of a century ago, and reputed to be haunted at night by ghosts of the dear departed. I saw no apparitions, but definitely heard mysterious voices emanating from the sun-glowing glades and lakeside meadows below my west-wing windows, and leapt out of bed several times during the first two nights to see if the owners could be observed, but they were invisible.

The sheer rustic and Arcadian loveliness of the scenes on Midsummer eve, scenes bringing inevitably to mind the England of Herrick and of Ben Jonson, have now their appointed place in the treasure-house of memory. From early morning the young men and maidens, mostly wearing the fine and colourful costumes of their respective regions, wander away into the woods and meadows to gather leaves and wildflowers and sprigs of silver birch with which to festoon and enwreath the huge Maypole tree, which, amid much gaiety and gusts of hand-clapping, is solemnly raised after a procession of girls carrying lemon-leaf slips of young trees has bearded the director in his house, where he waits smilingly on the steps to reply to the speeches of welcome and to wish all students and visitors a joyous Midsummer.

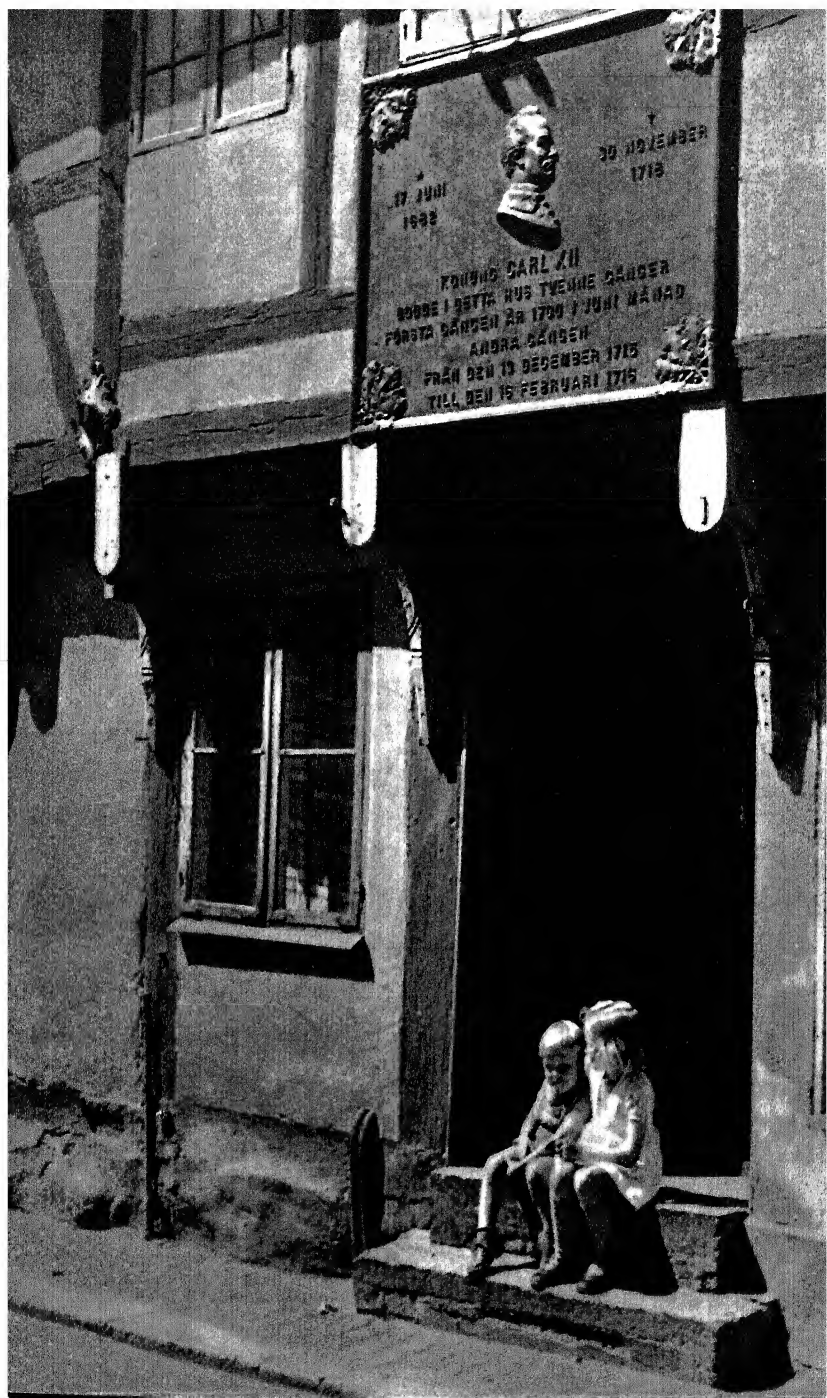
That leaf- and flower-entwined Maypole at Nääs, rising above a wide green sward flanked by the large dance-hall and one of the men's residential buildings, with broad cornfields on one side and a meadow sloping down to the lake on the other, is certainly the tallest I have seen anywhere in Sweden, even in Dalarna, the very heart of the midsummer revelry. At Nääs, on Midsummer eve and all the next day, hundreds of boys and girls, men and women, and inner rings of flaxen-haired laughing children, dance round and round to the old Swedish measures and songs played by fiddlers from Falun and other towns and sung heartily by

everybody, even when whirling breathlessly round in the *schottisch* or the *polka*.

Most of the participants, including the adorable children, are dressed in their regional costumes, which provide an absolute riot of colour against the green of the sward and the shimmering silver of the lake—costumes from Närke, from Halland, from Bohuslän, from Södermanland, from Småland, from Skåne, from Västergötland and Östergötland, and Halsingland, and the vast and lonely northern provinces; and sometimes a unique dress appears, like one I saw in 1947 when the wearer had on her head a wide white starched lace covering, something after the style of the head-covering of Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville*, only pure white instead of black. This comes from Vinåker, as I discovered by finding a similar one worn by a wooden model in the Nordiska Museum in Stockholm. And sometimes large ornate necklaces and heavy jewellery similar to that worn by Spanish women with their festive dresses, gleams and coruscates over some finely embroidered bodice or snow-white linen blouse.

All these brilliant costumes—blouse, bodice, apron, long billowy skirt of pure wool, white, green or red stockings, and bonnets of varying hues and designs: and those of the men, too, whose vivid yellow breeches and flaming waistcoats dart in and out in the measures of the dance—are hand-worked, and most of them have been passed down from mother to daughter and father to son through several generations. It is a captivating sight in the early morning to see clusters of graceful and lovely Swedish girls wearing these beautiful habiliments, "flower-pots alive", walking from one of the old timbered houses down a sloping bridle-path with a broad field of swaying green corn for background. All the true meaning and significance of feminine grace and charm are there captivatingly displayed as they were intended to be in the pre-industrial age for the joy, consolation and delight of mankind.

With the first gay notes of the fiddlers on Midsummer eve, and joining hands with the exultant and merry multitude swaying in great concentric rings round the Maypole, I was whirled around in a dionysian, a bacchantic frenzy; and whenever the music stopped for a moment the circles suddenly dissolved into scattered



17 JUNI  
1692

30 NOVEMBER  
1715

FÖRORD CARL XII

AVGÅR I DETTA HUS TVENNE GÅRDER

FÖRSTA GÅRDEN ÅR 1700 I JUNI MÅNAD

ANDRA GÅRDEN

FRÅN DEN 13 DECEMBER 1715

TILL DEN 15 FEBRUARI 1715





fragments with each male seizing the nearest female and dancing the appropriate measure until the rings formed up again to continue their circumvolutions. Except during the annual Apollonian festivals of the Ionians on Delos and the Panathenaic festival every five years in the Athens of Pericles, I suppose that so much grace, colour, and beauty have seldom been seen together in Europe at one time. And indeed, there was something truly Hellenic both in the setting and in the sheer lyricism of the scene at this annual welcome to the northern summer after winter's long reign.

On Midsummer Day came the mock bridal procession, preceded by an outrider and twenty maidens, garlanded and carrying branches of the silver birch, an echo of the old pagan festivals, and followed by the fiddlers and files of men and maidens all wearing their brilliant costumes. The "bride" wearing her green crown of birchwood and the "bridegroom" in his regional dress, were borne to the steps of the large dance-hall in a carriage decked with leaves and branches, while another conveyed the "parents" and the "minister", who was to conduct the "marriage" ceremony. Oh, how my eyes feasted on the gorgeous colour of it all as I stood in the very heart of the throng crowding round the steps, with embroidered bonnets above golden hair and blue blue eyes bobbing around me in every direction. Oh world, I thought, starved of beauty and light and following after false gods which are leading you to perdition, return return to the pristine joy and freshness of this Midsummer festival at Nääs and your soul shall be healed! . . .

During the afternoon a display was given inside the big hall of the folk-dances and country measures which have been passed down through the centuries, expressing as no words could the sentiment, pathos, humour, passion, emotional conflicts, jealousies and belligerencies of earlier ages in this land of natural men and natural women. There was the "Weavers' Dance", in which girls representing the spools of a loom weaved backwards and forwards, criss-ways and cross-ways, in the stately measures of this most charming and graceful dance, finishing up with a "threading" movement as one team flowed in and out beneath the upraised and entwined arms of the other. There was the "Forest Dwellers'

Dance", a merry measure involving considerable acrobatic prowess on the part of the four boys taking part; and the *örfiladansen*, or "Ear-Boxing Dance", in which the girl dancers pretended to slap their male partners' faces (the head of one girl in sky-blue dress and a sort of blue turban, might have come straight from a base in the Acropolis Museum) as the men brought their hands together with resounding smacks.

Then there was the "Halling", a very striking dance of Norwegian origin in which two athletic youths clad only in blue shorts and moving with majesty struck magnificent poses in time with the music, or performed rhythmic acrobatics, providing effects truly sculptural, authentically antique as the Pyrrhic dance which remains in a changed form in parts of Greece, and the dances of old Egypt; and the amusing "Ox Dance", a clever euterpian representation of a good-natured male dog-fight, ending up with hearty slaps on the back; and the "Reluctant Swain" dance, with the girl making slow and teasing advances to the boy—both wearing clogs—who keeps his back resolutely turned towards her until, by dint of advances and withdrawals, she overcomes his shyness, the dance concluding with a jolly polka with the heavy wooden clogs of the dancers resounding merrily over the wooden floor.

The folk-dancing ended on the green with a measure in which all the participants were wearing fancy dress, where there was no self-consciousness before the hundreds of spectators but only a perfect identification with the characters personified; and then a stately bucolic "Harvesters' Dance" with the men carrying long wooden scythes over their shoulders and the girls wooden hay-rakes, all moving round and grouping and regrouping to the fiddlers' melody, with the late sunshine streaming down upon them, and with the shimmering lake and the green forest beyond for background.

At night the waltz, the polka and the schottische were danced with a will in the big hall by all the "flower-pots alive" wearing their different regional costumes, as well as by those not in national dress who were at the *fest* by special invitation.

The director, Dr. Lindahl, had kindly introduced me to a

wearer of the charming Leksand costume from Dalarna, where each parish has its own distinctive designs, and after one of the dances we walked down by the lakeside to get cool, where the Midsummer glow from the translucent evening sky brought an atmosphere of sheer magic to the scene.

We sat down on white garden seats by some trees and watched the swallows flitting back and forth over the shining breast of the water, and I recited poems from *Cities of Troy* and the most recent verses written in Visby, which I had read, too, in the cemetery at Karlstad. The soft muslin folds of my companion's blouse revealed the cream-white contours of her bosom, and the colours of her dress harmonised perfectly with the scarlets and mauves of the evening sky. Birds twittered in the branches above us, and the gentle splash of oars from the middle of the lake sent expanding ripples across the turquoise surface of the water. As I came to the end of the Visby poem and its final couplet:

*May Christ from His high Mercy-seat lean down  
And pluck my soul at death for Beauty's Crown—*

she sat back heavily and drew in her breath with a gasp. "Ah!" she said, "that is *wonderful!*"

Then we strolled back to the green where hundreds and hundreds of brightly dressed figures were drawn up in readiness for a march to the supper tables; and the next morning I sailed for England.

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*

The following year we met again, and I read more verses I had written, this time under the direct inspiration of *Midsommar*:

In your eyes I found Love's wonder,  
All my longing and desire,  
On my head there broke Love's thunder,  
In my heart there leapt Love's fire.

We had met by lake and forest,  
Costumed you like Leksand flower,  
And I kissed your cheek my dearest,  
In the high Midsummer hour.

IN VÄSTERGÖTLAND AGAIN

Then I saw you not for long, dear,  
Not for sun-lost months away:  
Through an arctic English winter  
Flamed in me a Swedish May!

I returned and sought you yearning,  
Found you as a diver pearls,  
With your golden beauty burning  
Brightly, of all Swedish girls.

Ah, the hour when I embraced you,  
When the Maypole cast its spell,  
And my arms adored, enlaced you,  
Pen nor tongue could ever tell.

In that moment, Margareta,  
Pain and longing fled and joy  
Flooded all my being like a  
Dionysian Grecian boy!

Gone were war's dark years of anguish;  
In your arms what tender bliss!  
Love should not in absence languish  
For such ecstasy as this. . . .

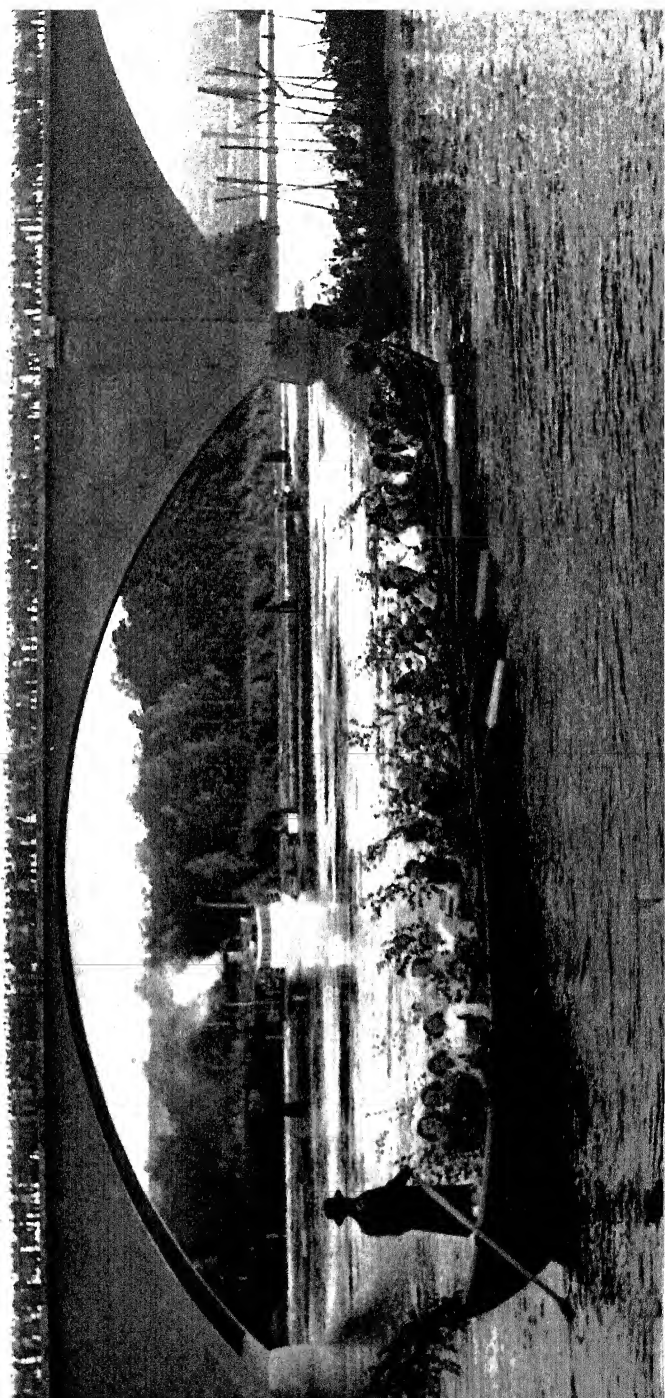
In your arms I found Love's wonder,  
All my longing and desire,  
On my ears there burst Love's thunder,  
In my heart there burned Love's fire. . . .

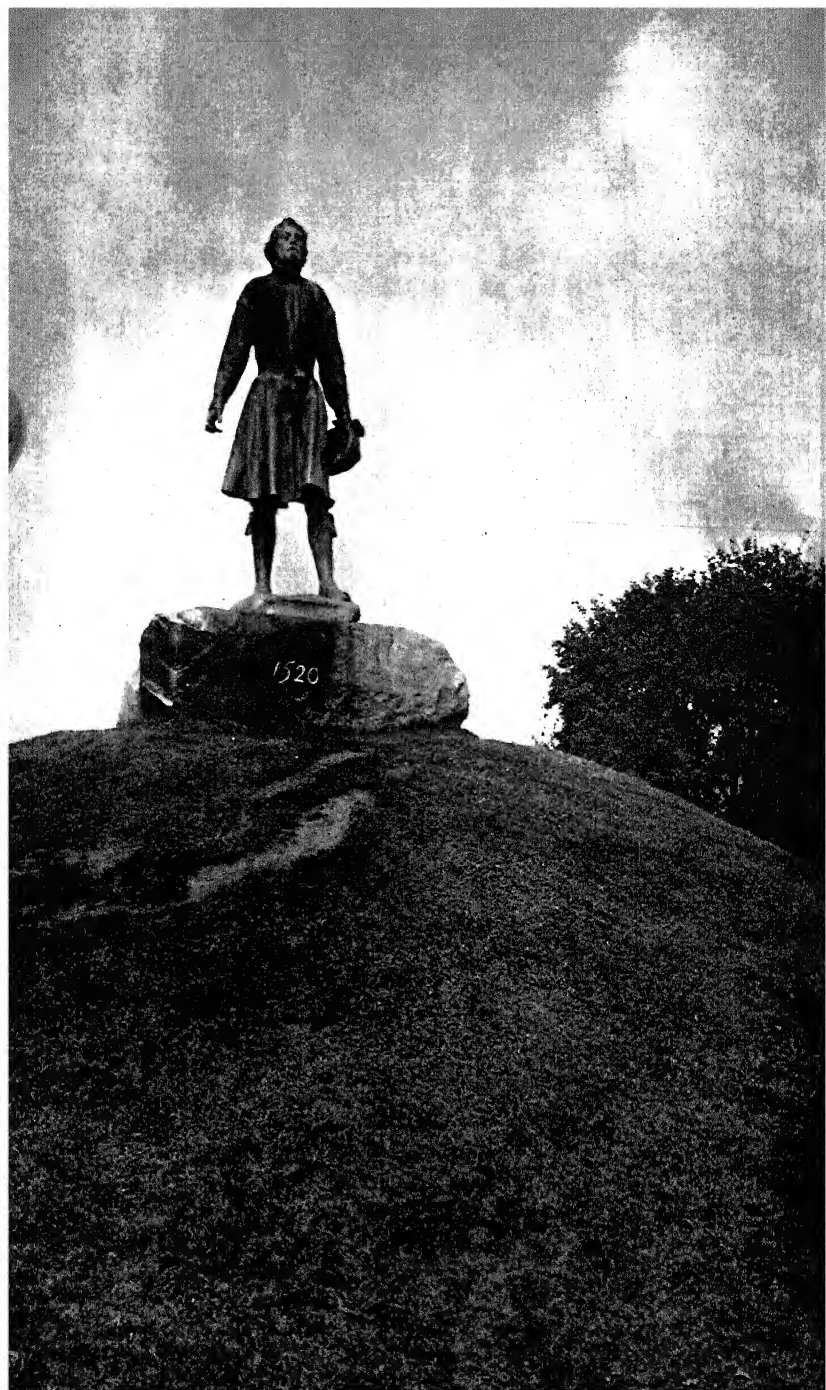
Tho' Creation crack and chaos  
Come again to this fair world,  
Fanfares rang in Thebes and Teos  
When Love's gonfalon unfurled!

The poem was not, I thought, unworthy of the lyrical land of  
Fröding and Karlfeldt.

"It may live for hundreds of years," she said.  
That is what she said.

7





# DALARNA—"NERVE AND SINEW"

## CHAPTER XXXI

### ON THE SHORES OF LAKE SILJAN

*Thronging, too, beneath the trees  
Are bright skirts and bodices.*

KARLFELDT, *Apple Harvest*

THE FINE YEOMAN INHABITANTS of Dalarna (or Dalecarlia, as the name of the province is unaccountably anglicised), the veritable heart still of the mighty Swedish kingdom, remain to this day virtually untouched by the fever and tumult of modern life, and refreshingly free of the corroding taint of industrialism which has spoiled so many other hitherto idyllic regions of the earth. Moreover, they retain also to this day the finer characteristics of their Viking ancestors, who settled in all this green and wooded and pastoral landscape surrounding Lake Siljan, "the Eye of Dalarna", at least twelve hundred years ago, and maybe much earlier.

The Dalecarlians are noted for their strong instinct for liberty, their sturdy build, blonde hair, blue eyes, and "apple-harvest" complexions; and by their traditional piety, superstitiousness, rock-like calmness, and innate belief in the dignity of life. It was from Näs, the home of the poet Karlfeldt and populated from time immemorial, in the forest district of Björbo—where some of the famous brilliant-hued national dresses and costumes are worn—that an entire community emigrated in 1896 to Jerusalem. This epic event Selma Lagerlöf immortalised in her great novel (and personal favourite) *Jerusalem*, the concluding incident of which long haunts the memory of the reader—the little children wailing as they are led off to the distant rail-siding: "*We don't want to go to Jerusalem; we want to go home!*" At Kärningberget, outside Leksand, one of the oldest parishes, eight local women were burned as witches as comparatively recently as 1670.



But, over and above their piety and superstition, these remarkable "people of the Dales" enjoy to an enhanced degree the faculties which Nature always develops in those who keep faith with her through centuries—a reserved but joyous temperament, robust good health, resolute will, iron strength of character, purity of idiom, instinctive hospitality, and lack of prudishness.

"At least twice in our history Dalarna has saved Sweden," a leading Stockholm editor remarked to me on my first visit in 1936. Led by one of their own men, the great Engelbrekt, they supported in 1435 a popular rising against the oppressive and domineering Danish stewards brought into the country by Eric of Pomerania; and under Gustavus Vasa it was the heroic if slow-moving men of Dalarna who were mainly responsible for driving the Danes into Skåne.

Listen to the wonderful story, one of the great episodes in history which, however, is as yet virtually unknown to the average Briton:

The last Sunday before Christmas in the year 1520 the Rättvik people had as usual gathered outside the Church after the service. A young stranger stepped forward and began to speak. He related how the Danish king, Christian II, who was also king of Sweden in virtue of the union between the two countries, had massacred a number of the most prominent men in Sweden at his coronation in Stockholm, and that the king was ruling with great injustice and tyranny. The young man, Gustavus Vasa, had himself been a prisoner, but had succeeded in making his escape and reaching Dalarna after many adventures. He now appealed to the Dalecarlians to take up arms and free the country, but they were slow to leave their homes without more definite information. He then passed on to the village of Mora and spoke to the people there, but, although they sympathised with him, they also refused to follow him. This being his last opportunity to arouse the people he continued his flight towards the Norwegian frontier, hotly pursued by the king's emissaries. Shortly afterwards, however, the Dalecarlians received confirmation of the sad news and swift ski-runners were sent in pursuit of the stranger. Gustavus Vasa returned and took command in the War of Liberation that followed, and which ended with his coronation, in

1523, as King of Sweden. He inaugurated a new epoch in the history of the country and is now recognised as one of the ablest rulers who ever reigned in the North of Europe. (Axel Palmgren.)

This moving call to save their country addressed by Vasa to the male congregation of Mora church one summer day in 1520 was suitably commemorated by Zorn in a striking statue of "the young stranger" erected on the actual spot where the appeal was made, and there I sometimes pause to ponder on the predetermined "accidents" of destiny.

In commemoration of the pursuit of Gustavus Vasa by the two ski-runners from Mora to Sälen in the winter of 1520-21, the *Vasaloppet*, or Vasa Ski-race, now takes place annually over the identical route they followed, but in the opposite direction. An outstanding event of Swedish winter sports in which champion skiers participate, it is held at the end of February or the beginning of March, dependent on the local snow conditions. Inaugurated in 1922, when the victor was E. Alm who covered the 90 kilometres (approximately 54 miles) in 7 hours, 32 minutes, 49 seconds, it has been run each year since, with the exception of 1932 and 1934.

Since 1943 the race has gone five times (not in succession) to N. Karlson, of Mora, who in 1948 completed the course in 5 hours, 35 minutes, 13 seconds, his best time. Remarkably good as this time is, it is not, however, the record, which is held by G. Andersson who gained the race in 1945 in 5 hours, 18 minutes, 43 seconds. The number of skiers taking part in the race has varied: in 1944—200; 1945—251; 1946—277; 1947—160; 1948—267.

The Siljansdal, the region round Lake Siljan, is redolent at the present day of the dominant character and vivid personality of this remarkable Swede, Gustavus Vasa. At Rättvik the low church wall is still to be seen from where he made his appeal to the inhabitants, and at Utmeland, a short distance to the south of Mora, a small building occupies the site of the cellar in which the wife of Tomt Mats Larsson concealed him from his Danish pursuers by hastily placing over the entrance after he had descended

a great beer-vat. The painting by J. F. Höckert of this dramatic episode is a striking piece of imaginative delineation, which proved a constant source of inspiration to Zorn when, as a young man, he was struggling to develop his art.

At Ornäs (as I mentioned in Chapter I), not very far away, still stands the homestead, or *stuga*, dating from medieval times, where he was almost taken by his pursuers through a betrayal by his host, whose brave wife, Barbro Stigsdotter, saved her future king in the nick of time by letting him down from the loft by a sheet.

The *Vasaloppet* now brings to Mora each February a huge concourse of tradition-loving spectators from all parts of Sweden. Indeed, so popular an annual event has it become that it bids fair to rival soon the annual Midsummer festival, when the entire population, watched by thousands of visitors, turns out dressed in the delightful national costumes of the province to attend church service and to dance and sing round the Maypole until midnight.

Of Rättvik, Leksand and Mora, the first-named, situated on a wooded inlet on the eastern shore of Lake Siljan, is for me the most beautiful and the most redolent of the past. In all three historic villages, however, one sees on feast days and at the unforgettable Midsummer festival the brilliant national costumes which Karlfeldt has so vividly identified in his lyrical poems; and the children look particularly enchanting in them. As on Visingsö, the local brides wear above their white veils a green crown as in heathen times. Outside the white walls of Rättvik church cluster a line of low huts, where, in former days, the farmers from the outlying districts tethered their horses during morning service.

At Leksand, where the sight of the gaily dressed womenfolk in midsummer coming down the long tree-lined avenue from the church is one of the unique pageants of the world, it is possible to see the worshippers arriving and departing in the long narrow boats, seating about fifty, which have conveyed the Dales-folk to church services since the Middle Ages. A very remarkable painting of such a Midsummer scene at Leksand a hundred years ago by the Danish painter Marstrand is to be found in the State Museum at Copenhagen (a magnificent collection which contains

the best self-portrait I have seen in any European gallery, including those of Spain, of El Greco—a full-length study, an astonishing masterpiece).

Dalarna, besides and outstretching its fame as a thriving centre of *Hemslöjd*, or handicrafts, is of course a great mining region. Reference was made many chapters back to Falun, the capital of Dalecarlia, and to the great copper mine, “Stora Kopparbergs gruva”, the veritable cradle of Swedish industry; and to the oldest company in the world, Stora Kopparbergs Bergslag, which still runs it, and whose original charter of 1288 may yet be seen. The main product of the mine to-day is, however, not copper but sulphur-ore, with copper-vitriol, gold and silver as by-products.

On the shores of Lake Siljan *härbren*, ancient dwelling and store huts built of horizontal logs raised on low piles with dovetailed beam ends, are still intact and standing after a thousand years, and an entire “village” of them, which Zorn collected and presented to his native Mora, is to be seen at the *Gammalgård* at Mora, including cow-byres and boat-huts, and latrines which were used communally by the uninhibited peasants of those times. The interiors of the dwellings were often cosy enough, with an open fireplace in one corner, serviceable handmade furniture, and deep bed-bunks by the side of the *härbre*, concealed during the day by finely woven lace and linen hangings; and with a fixed ladder leading up to the loft, where the younger members of the family slept. A similar collection is grouped at Orsa, whose inhabitants are reputed to speak a dialect among themselves which closely resembles that used in the Scottish highlands, although I cannot say that I consciously heard a word of it when I went over to Orsa to see the dancing. The girls, who are very tall and blonde in that village, wear dresses something like a nun’s habit, while the men favour very long coats, short trousers of leather, and black stockings; and the sturdy Orsa mothers carry their babies slung on their backs like eskimos, in a so-called “bögg” (cf. our word “bag”).

In summer-time the farm girls in Dalarna, as in other hilly regions of Sweden, used to go away for three months on *Fäbovall*,

driving the cattle before them up to the rich pasturelands which are inaccessible in winter; recalling the earlier pastoral pilgrimages in agricultural Europe, and, indeed, the seasonal wanderings of the shepherds and goatherds in classical Greece and Sicily. It is said to be increasingly difficult now to persuade them to leave the comfortable homesteads for such a lonely if lyrical exile.

Amid the essentially sylvan surroundings on the shores of "the eye of Dalarna" Anders Zorn grew up, absorbing the daily beauty of the scene, all green and gold in summer, or covered with glittering snow in winter, when Mora itself seems as if cast under a magical spell. To record with burin or brush or charcoal the lovely land of his childhood, and the racially pure and wholly unique human types which dwelt therein, was to such an instinctive and exuberant artist as natural as to breathe the pure Mora air.

To-day Zorn rests in the wide churchyard there beneath a rune-stone—illegitimate son of a local peasant woman (whose dignified beauty he has immortalised in an etching whose most appropriate companion piece is Rembrandt's exquisite study of his mother) and a German brewer in Stockholm. His art has filled the artistic consciousness of his country with such glowing masterpieces as Sorolla has filled the artistic consciousness of Spain. And not the least of his most brilliant technical triumphs is in the depiction of interior firelight on female bodies, which glow like antique statuary under his fervent brush in the canvases on exhibition in the National Museum at Stockholm:

Beauty is momentarily in the mind—  
The fitful tracing of a portal:  
But in the flesh it is immortal . . .  
The body dies; the body's beauty lives.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wallace Stevens (American poet, 1882—).

## CHAPTER XXXII

### EXCURSION TO ORSA

*Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing  
A flowery band to bind us to the earth.*

KEATS, *Endymion*

THE OPEN-AIR MUSEUM at Mora, "Zorn's *Gammalgård*" as it is commemoratively named, lies on the outskirts of the town, just beyond a large timber factory, where thousands of felled trees from the neighbouring forests are gathered at the lakeside each month in readiness for floating down to the mills at Leksand. Here may be seen what is virtually a Viking village, for the various ancient *bärbren* acquired by the painter during his lifetime have been so arranged as to represent as faithfully as possible a Dalecarlian lakeside encampment as it was a thousand years ago, or at the close of that epoch when the roving Norsemen had settled northern France and part of Russia and had ranged in their high-prowed boats as far as Greenland and America.

In the huts in which these ancestors of the modern Swedes lived the conditions were necessarily of the most primitive. An open fireplace raised in the middle on stones from which the smoke escaped (or, as one imagines, mostly did not escape) through an aperture in the roof, table and benches fashioned from unplanned logs, and a place for sleeping marked by a rude and primitively worked cloth covering. A few wooden spoons and ladles scooped out with knives and flints and some bone needles for the use of the womenfolk completed the interior amenities. "Härbren", some of two storeys, were used for storing hay or grain or rough farming implements, or for carpentering or other workshops; while in the centre of the village green was a well with a long pole for raising the water-buckets, similar to those to be seen to-day on the Hungarian *puszta*.

When the visitor has satisfied his curiosity in this first section of the *Gammalgård* he passes on down a grassy slope to a further

group of hutments nearer the lakeside where, surrounded by the immemorial sloping fences of pointed poles, which have remained since early ages as one of the most distinctive features of the Swedish landscape, are to be seen a primitive flour-mill, stalls for cattle, eating-huts for the men, and two magnificent log boat-houses placed right alongside the lake. These huts still house the original long boats for which they were constructed so many centuries ago, the boats being not very dissimilar in design to the Nile funerary boats of ancient Egypt, or to those long open canoes in which the Polynesian exiles made their 2000-mile epic voyage from Raratonga to New Zealand in the twelfth century of our era. . . .

It was Midsummer Day and Mora was crowded with folk clad in the bright country costume of the region: the males in white linen shirts with full sleeves, finely embroidered scarlet woollen waistcoats, yellow cow-hide breeches, red stockings and black shoes with bright buckles; the women wearing white lace bonnets, elaborately worked white cotton bodices with billowy sleeves, tight black waistcoats edged in red and green and bearing gleaming metal buttons, heavy black woollen skirts of innumerable flounces, all set off by red stockings and shining buckles like the menfolk. In the streaming June sunlight the scene was one which brought back and transmuted into reality all childhood's memories of Hans Andersen and the brothers Grimm.

The previous evening I had seen a giant maypole raised at Leksand with great pomp and ceremony, in the presence of not less than seven thousand spectators. In fact, so dense had been the multitude that I had found it expedient to take an early bus back into the forest solitudes above Rättvik, where I walked about in the woods in the white light of the midsummer night until the small hours. This day there was to be a quieter and more secluded celebration at Orsa, a village surrounded by vast forests at the extreme northern corner of the lake.

After early tea, therefore, I took a small country bus which climbed for an hour through lovely mountain and pastoral scenery to a height from whence there was a pleasant walk of some two

kilometres to the village. Some sun-tanned peasants were in the bus, and also a sturdy blue-eyed, fair-haired girl of nine or ten, accompanied by her grandmother (or so I supposed). The child, who looked in radiant health, was obviously a born humourist, for her companion, who followed her every movement with dancing eyes, would clap her hands and burst into peals of gay laughter every few moments at some smart reply or pertinent sally. Here, indeed, were happiness, abounding health, good looks and good humour—a combination not without symbolic significance of the Dalecarlians.

The bus stopped on the crest of a hill and I descended and followed the dimly apprehended directions of some country youths down a long incline towards the lake, which now gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. Deep woods and forests carpeted with soft green moss stretched away in the distance from either side of the roadway, but here and there was a clearing containing a few red bungalows with clothes drying on a line. At a bend in the road progress was arrested by a chain of cars. At a turnstile a group of children and peasants were gathered. This was the *Gammalgård* of Orsa (spoken quickly together the words sound strikingly Norse!), so having paid the kronor entrance I climbed up a green slope and immediately found myself in the midst of a most handsome and well-behaved crowd of local swains and maidens.

The Orsa "Old Homestead" was just on the fringe of a mighty forest, with its ancient *bärbren* clustered about the open green, while beyond was ranged battalion after battalion of tall trees stretching far away through the green aisles of the primeval forest, the authentic homeland of faery.

The good Orsa citizens with their pretty blonde daughters and delighted children were grouped about the green awaiting the state arrival of the Maypole which, decked with leafy branches and newly carved ornamentations, was presently dragged in by a decorated shire horse to the playing of four fiddlers, each wearing embroidered woollen waistcoats and the yellow cowhide breeches. Now everyone crowded into the central clearing from benches and primitive tea-tables to witness the solemn raising of the



maypole, skilfully directed by a tall and smiling woodsman; and as the final push was given and the pole firmly secured in place for the next twelve months a joyous cheer echoed through the forest and a storm of handclapping.

Now began the real business of the evening. Four human chains gathered round the Maypole: the tiny tots inside, then a chain of older boys and girls, after that the youths of twenty or thereabouts with their rosy-cheeked partners: and finally the strong men and dignified matrons, joined by a few sporting sexagenarians, all waiting for the fiddles to strike up the first dance. By this time the number of spectators had grown very considerably and the narrow balconies as well as the lower platforms of all the *bårben* were thick with smiling onlookers. Then followed a minute's pause as the last arrivals in the chain were martialled into place after which, with a sudden flourish, the fiddlers commenced with the gayest, tunefullest and jolliest jig imaginable, while all the dancers hand-in-hand started to career round the Maypole, keeping in time as far as was in their power to the intoxicating rhythm of the music—a scene not soon to be forgotten and one to which only a Breughel could do justice.

An hour passed with this innocent diversion in full swing, while groups of brightly clad visitors turned to the long refreshment tables beyond the huts, where a bevy of charming Orsa maidens dressed in full festival costume were doing the honours of the afternoon. A short distance away and nearer the green forest stood a round raised platform surrounded by a railing, and to this vantage-point now repaired the fiddlers, still merrily playing, to take up new positions in a stand above the dancing-floor; for it was on this floor that the celebrated country folk-dances which I had come many miles to see were to be given—the rustic Ox-dance, the various regional polkas, the Daldans, and other high-spirited numbers which demand considerable agility for their right interpretation. Everybody now came crowding round, the boys climbing the trees for a better view and the children seeking a favourable perch on the shoulders of parents or uncles.

All of a sudden the dancers appeared in the centre of the floor: a team of eight girls and eight young men, facing each other in

spectacular couples, all resplendent in full Dalecarlian summer dress. The fiddles broke into a lilting folk-tune with a repetitive refrain which seemed to breathe the very spirit of the pagan forest: and in a moment the group on the floor was one whirling mass of multi-coloured movement.

I had found the immemorial Sweden.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> How deep these people are rooted in Time is indicated by a true story told me by the Assistant Press Attaché at the Swedish Embassy. His London tailor, who left Leksand twenty years ago, returned on a visit last summer and sought out his old boyhood seat on the church wall. Presently a former schoolmate came in sight, who, as he passed the wall, glanced with a smile of recognition at the solitary occupant, remarked as of old "Hello, Sven," and continued homewards without another word!

## THROUGH NORTHERN SWEDEN

### CHAPTER XXXIII

#### TO THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

*This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,  
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,  
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.*

LONGFELLOW, *Evangeline*

IT WAS ON A BRIGHT Scandinavian day of clean filigree sunlight and cloudflecked skies that I started on the thousand-mile rail journey from Gothenburg to Björkliden, at the utmost northernmost boundary of Sweden and hundreds of miles deep in the Arctic Circle, armed with a small bottle of "jungle-oil" to keep off the mosquitoes—"Tropik—och Djungelolja MOSKITO mot mygg och insekter".

It is easy enough to be wise after the event, and doubtless after experience of travel in four continents I should have realised that a continuous train journey over a land mass equivalent to the distance between London and Rome would be a test of endurance, especially when no guarantee had been forthcoming from the ticket agency in the Hotellplatsen at Gothenburg that a sleeping berth would be available beyond Krylbo, where a change had to be made to catch the Lapland express. I might, of course, have gone via Stockholm, slept the night in the capital, and boarded the train for Abisko at its starting-point, the Central Station, at eight o'clock next morning; such an alternative would have avoided two nights on the move. But it would also have meant traversing a route already fairly well known, whereas by proceeding to Krylbo, on the Dal river, in Västmanland, and joining the train for Lapland there, I should pass through a part of Sweden hitherto unseen and catch a glimpse of towns and cities so far unvisited.

With a light heart, therefore, and with even a sense of adventure

and excitement, I settled in a corner facing-seat as the train for Krylbo, Gävle and Söderhamn left behind the now familiar platforms of Gothenburg.

The first town of any consequence was Alingsås, a place of many factories where the "father" (and presumably the "mother", too) of Swedish Arts and Crafts, one Jonas Alströmer, was born in 1685, an event commemorated by a bronze statue in the main square. Crossing leisurely some bleak plains once covered (as I learned) with oak and beech forests, we reached presently Falköping, an important junction and the centre of a district of great archæological interest. For the whole area is studded with so-called "galleried" graves dating right back to the Stone Age. From finds in recent years of bones, daggers, spears and arrow-heads in these fantastic tombs, where a tall man can stand upright, it is possible to deduce that cows, dogs and horses were all domesticated in central Sweden at least four thousand years ago, and probably earlier—which should interest my friend H. J. Massingham, who is always bewailing mankind's desertion of his natural estate and inheritance.

We made a long halt at Skövde, a garrison town with a population of ten thousand, where I recollected well enough Åke Pressner's kind sister and brother-in-law had their home, who had extended to a stranger such whole-hearted hospitality in the beach hut at Falkenberg. The platform was filled with tall soldiers looking very smart in their grey-greenish uniforms, and new conscripts still wearing their white tasselled student caps and seeming rather bewildered as they threaded their way through the crowds to the exit carrying kitbags containing, I supposed, the uniforms which would make them mere cogs in a military machine for the next twelve months.

I was tempted to leave the train, too, at Skövde, which seemed a neat and imposing town of handsome buildings and parks and leafy avenues, for a pause there would have provided an opportunity to visit one of the oldest and most renowned of Swedish medieval cities, Skara, where, in A.D. 1000, the chieftain of the Vestrogoths, Ragvald Jarl, wedded the sister of Olav Tryggvesson, the Norwegian king (whose burial mound, as I said on page 96,

is still to be seen on the islet of Tryggön, off Smögen), and embraced the Christian faith, what time Olof Skörkonung, whom we have heard of at Sigtuna, was baptised in the Huslaby spring nearby by the English missionary Sigfrid. Now I shall never see Skara's eleventh-century Cathedral, another superb example of early French Gothic and a worthy peer of the Cathedral of St. Mary at Uppsala, which it so closely resembled, with its majestic interior "distinguished by a noble simplicity", nor the mausoleum-tomb of Colonel Eric Soop, who had once saved the life in battle of Gustavus Adolphus, for it was destroyed by fire after my return to England. . . .

The train moved out of Skövde station and presently crossed a fertile plain and then the Göta Canal at Toreboda, where I leaned far out of the window to catch sight of that idyllic landscape, the memory of which had never faded since that lovely three-day water-journey to Stockholm ten years before.

I had just removed my shoes and curled my feet up for comfort and rest in my corner-seat, like a Moghul on his Diwan, when we arrived at Askersund, about which there is little to say, and headed "hell-for-leather" for Hallsberg, where I was soon again in the lovely province of Södermanland. The guard smiled amiably as he entered the compartment to clip tickets, and fellow-passengers pretended not to notice the unheard-of informality of the *Engelsman*, who took off his shoes, not ostensibly because he saw "every common bush afire with God" but to conserve strength for the remaining eight hundred miles to Björkliden.

I was glad when the train reached Örebro but sad when they said unto me that here Olaus and Laurentius Petri were born, for I reflected that the brothers' fierce reforming zeal had encouraged Gustavus Vasa to break with Rome, thus bringing more division and schism into the Empire of Christ on earth, and severing the freshest and not the least fruitful branch from the ancient and most Catholic vine which flourishes yet in the Eternal City where it was planted nigh two thousand years ago.

I replaced my shoes and took a stroll along the platform at Örebro, which is a spacious station and well-swept, with high glass roof wondrously clean, sometimes pausing by a family

group replete with bags and packages to listen to their musical patter, and sometimes, for a full minute and far from my compartment, by the prettiest girls, or for to admire and for to see the dear and lovely children. (Indeed, a marvellous thing it is to stand, a foreigner and not a lord, but an "illiterate" of language—on a country town platform in the veritable heart of northern Sweden and feel harmoniously at one with a richly human multitude all on their way, if they did but know it, to that Spring-time Land where the trumpets sounded for Greatheart "on the other side". Fellow-travellers, I thought, whether to Eskiltuna or Kristinehamn, whether to Hedemora or Hudiksvall, to Sundsvall in Medelpad, or Östersund, headquarters of the famed winter sports in gigantic Jämtland; to Umeå, in forest-ridden Västerbotten, Luleå in uttermost Norrbotten (where poor Inga Dahlén came from who first persuaded me in Cairo to think about Sweden) to Koskullskulle, Kiruna, or to the remote solitudes of Kebnekaise: to one and all your immemorial toast, "*Skål!*")

As we neared Krylbo I calculated that I had been in the train already for ten hours, the time it used to take to travel by *rapide* from Geneva to Paris; but I was conscious of no fatigue—as yet.

It was, I declare, on the station at Krylbo, another region of iron, that I suddenly caught sight of a giant, the tallest man I have ever seen, not less than eight feet, I swear, and broad withal. He was "a Corinthian edifice on Tuscan foundations", and so immense was his bulk that he slouched along the platform like a young mammoth, rather than walked, and yet moved faster than the average pedestrian.

At Krylbo travellers travelling on to the far north had quite a long time to wait for the connection, but as the sky was still filled with light, even an hour before midnight, and the air warm and even balmy, the interlude passed pleasantly enough. There were many young men, and some sturdy-looking young women, carrying packs and studded mountain boots on their backs, obviously bound for a walking and climbing holiday in the neighbourhood of the famous and lonely Lap mountain of Kebnekaise, where only seasoned walkers are allowed to undertake the longer

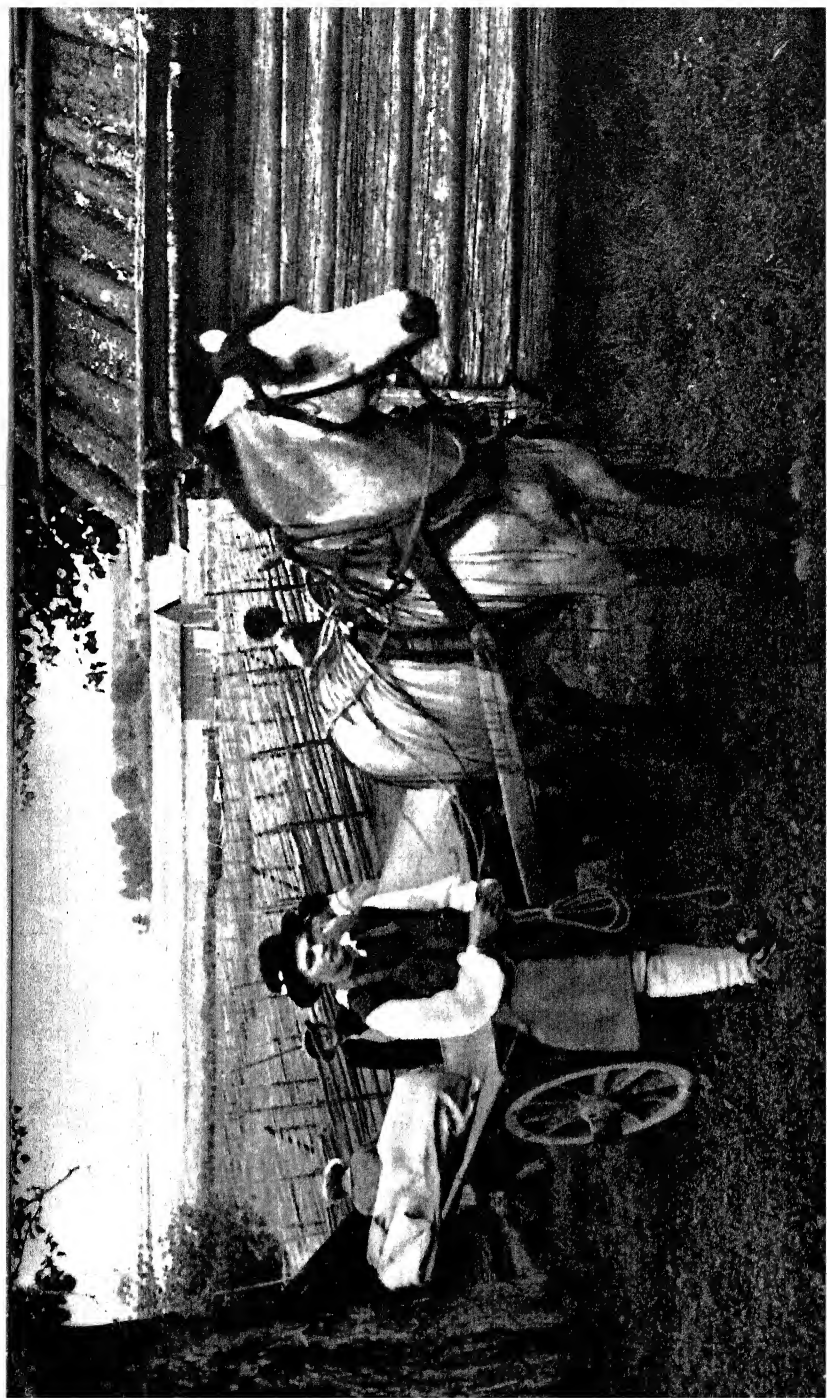
expeditions, and even then only if accompanied by guides, through wild regions which, except for an occasional Lap summer hut, are empty of human habitation.

At last the Abisko train thundered into the station, drawn by two massive Diesel engines, and there was a scramble with bags and rucksacks for the nearest compartments. Carried along by the onrush, I mounted the step of a second-class carriage and, a moment later, found myself in a narrow corridor where about twelve men and one young woman were standing gazing out at the name of the station and the distance from Stockholm and Abisko respectively.

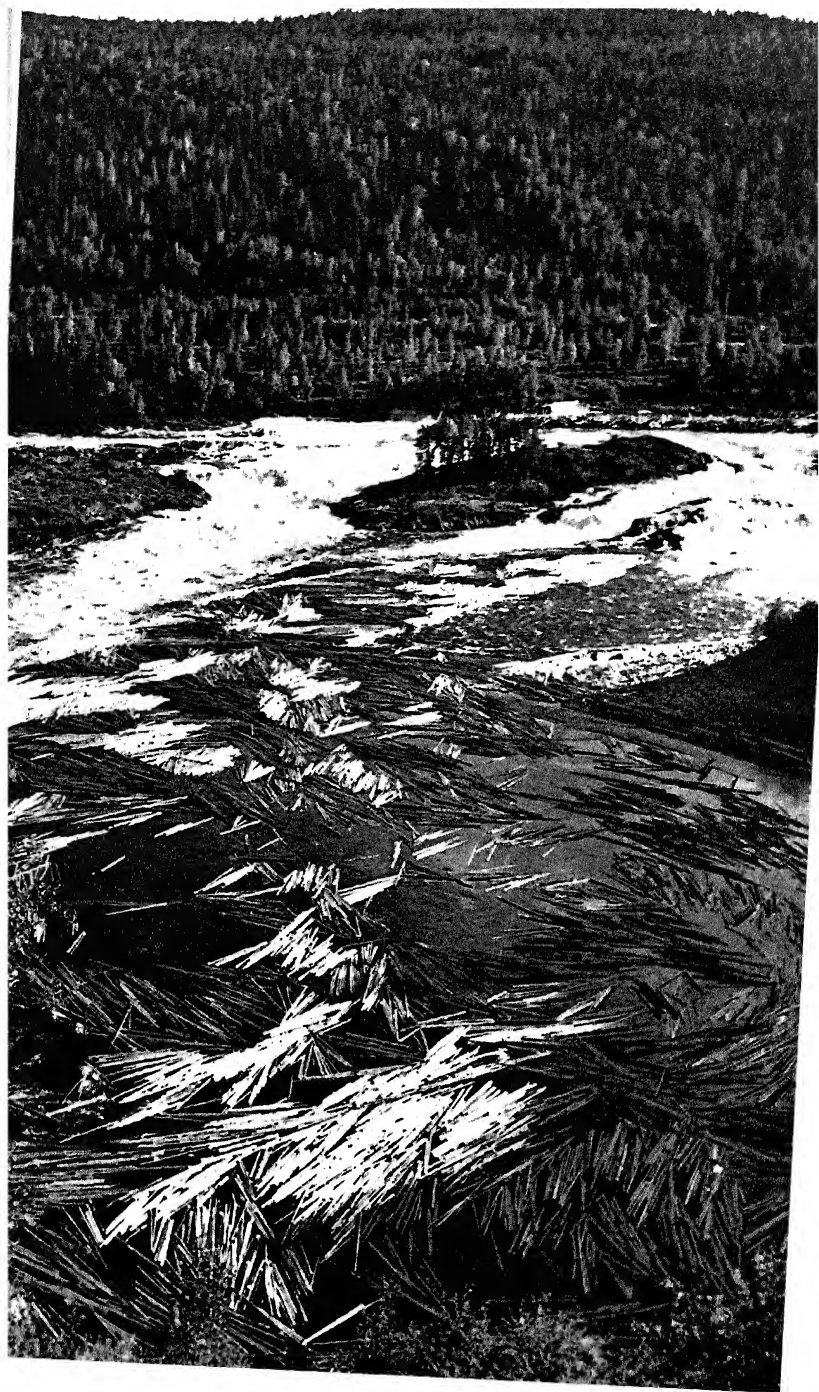
The express moved off, and the young woman who was standing next to me in the corridor began an earnest conversation with a train companion the gist of which, I gathered, was that she had left Stockholm at short notice and had no sleeping berth reserved. That, too, was my predicament, and I walked into the next carriage to see whether a corner was obtainable in an ordinary compartment. But all seats were literally littered with tired travellers in various elegant and inelegant stages of repose, and so I returned to the corridor to await developments.

In due course the sleeping-car attendant arrived and scrutinised our tickets, and then examined a long list of names from which I concluded that our own were absent, for after making some sounds which might or might not have meant that he would arrange something if he could, he moved along the corridor and presently disappeared.

I was now conscious of a feeling of tiredness and a sensation of nerve "tautness", for I had travelled already on this particular visit to Sweden a couple of thousand miles at least before ever I entered the Krylbo train at Gothenburg. Moreover, the steady electric *surge* of the Diesel engines, and the realisation of being drawn farther and farther into the vast and remote North began to plague my imagination. From the corridor windows, from the very banks of the single rail track, the vast primeval forest, terrifyingly immense and lonely, seemed to stretch away to infinity; and occasionally a rift in the dense mass of jungle verdure would reveal a gleaming river or rapid boiling and bursting along,







carrying on its swirling bosom regiments and armies of floating logs to some far sawmill. This was the forest primeval—

. . . The murmuring pines and the hemlocks  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in  
the twilight—

for a weird, unearthly pallor o'erspread the world. It was two o'clock in the morning, when human resistance is at its mean; all travellers had turned in to their sleeping berths and closed their doors; and even the girl without a berth had vanished, driven back by force of circumstances, I presumed, to one of the crowded compartments, which now looked like a series of Henry Moore's "sculptural" etchings of "sleepers in the Underground during an air raid".

We stormed through Storvik, in the province of Gästrikland, which has ironworks and sawmills about which, however, it was impossible to get up any enthusiasm at that hour; and then, with the inevitability of the "knock" in Tschaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony, came *Sandviken*, where the ironworks are world-famous I understand, and *Bollnäs*, lying on the shore of a widening in the Ljusån river inexplicably called on the map a "lake", "Lake Varpen".

Soon we had passed from Gästrikland into Hälsingland, where, at the Tönnebro creek, the holy Staffan, the local apostle, had been slain by heathens when all this country must have been as unexplored as Central Africa before Livingstone. But I could discover in my soul no interest whatever at that moment either in apostles or heathens (who are, indeed, at times very interesting); I was conscious only of exhaustion, and of a surrealist theme which drummed incessantly through my consciousness with the doom-like rhythm of the Diesels' intolerable persistency: "Stop the train!—Stop the train!—*Stop the train!*" Old familiar things, home, loved faces, the bright lights of restaurants, shops in Regent Street, in the Gran Via, in the Rue de la Paix, an unknown woman's smile, the eager voices of children, my wife's gay laugh, my son's stoicism when he cut his finger carving surreptitiously the "bow of Odysseus" with the breadknife—all seemed to be

falling away from consciousness, and life became resolved into an endless progression into remote and barbaric Laplands where all that one knew—beautiful as those lands might be, even as at the morning of Time—was that if the traveller left one bit of his anatomy unguarded or unsterilised for a moment it was punctured by crash-diving mosquitoes huge as the Queensland "Scots Greys".

This land of Sweden was, in truth, as my friend Sister Edith Peacey remarks in her excellent *Life of Saint Birgitta* (p. 24), "a land of great mysterious silences: the silence of wide snow-covered tracts—the listening silence of vast forests—the silence of the great lakes that seem to hold some secret in their depths; everywhere there is mystery and the vast unknown".

The Vast Unknown! . . . the wide savannahs of the sky, the inconceivable and inapprehensible distances between the planetary constellations, the thought of which in boyhood had so terrified me.

"Súbitamente,  
al bajar la tiniebla,  
te senti muy lejos,  
en una región indefensa  
y a merced de todas  
las grandes inclemencias.  
Te senti borrosa  
y plañidera;  
el corazon sin ancla  
y sin vela."<sup>1</sup>

("Suddenly  
as the darkness fell,  
I felt you were far from me,  
in a distant region defenceless,  
unsheltered, at the mercy  
of all the wild elements.  
I felt you were shadowy  
and sorely lamenting;  
your heart was without anchor,  
without sails.")

A door slid open and a young man with curly fair hair emerged in bright pyjamas and dressing-gown to gaze out with evident

<sup>1</sup> José Moreno Villa (translation by Eleanor L. Turnbull).

relish upon that appalling landscape of immeasurable forests unrelieved, except for a very occasional lumberman's hut beside some empty, vast and mist-covered lake, of any sign of human habitation. I beckoned to him, and he came to me.

"I must get out," I said; "I must leave this train."

"Oh, you are English," he replied; "this is the first time I have ever spoken English with an Englishman. I am on my way to Lapland, too, for the first time. I am an electrical engineer and I go on a visit of inspection to one of our power stations up there. But why not continue, as you have the ticket all the way?" He smiled openly, infectiously, in frank friendliness. The prospect opened of another fifteen hours on the move, before the sanctuary could be gained of the room reserved in that blessed Fjället Hotel at Björkliden. And the sense of spiritual defeat returned as the guard climbed into the compartment at Ostavall and stood solid and enduring beside us.

"No," I said, "I must leave the train and rest. Perhaps I can see Lapland another time."

The young man spoke in Swedish to the guard, who glanced round more, I thought, in sorrow than in anger.

"What did he say?"

"He said that he thinks you are silly: but I do not believe that he thinks, that he means anything."

How I liked that young Swede, so handsome, so courteous, so human, even to a train-leaving foreigner at three o'clock in the morning! His features suffused with the immortal sunshine of twenty-three (or he may have been "twenti-five"), as he smilingly threw a "Good night; I must go back to sleep", and returned to his berth.

The guard, too, passed down the empty corridor into the next carriage, without more ado.

And as the train slowed down and glided into the station at Ange, on the threshold of the great northern province of Angermanland, I picked up my valise and stepped down on to the static earth, and walked over to an iron seat where, except for an occasional stroll in the immediate vicinity of the "bush" station, I remained in deep meditation for the next two hours.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### CONCLUSION

*Gott giebt die Nüsse, aber er bricht sie nicht auf.*  
(*God gives the nuts, but He does not break them open.*)

GOETHE at Weimar, 9-10-1811

CORN-HAIRED CHILDREN were peacefully sleeping curled up on seats in the waiting-room beside stoical and calm-faced parents—children of Ange no doubt, "*non angli sed angeli*".

Among the books on display on the small bookstall which, not unnaturally, was not open at three o'clock in the morning, was Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome*. I was tempted to break the glass and borrow that notable novel, which would certainly have helped well enough to pass away the hours before the Järnvägshotellet, or Railway Hotel, opened for breakfast.

Instead, I sat pondering on the curious fact that here was I self-marooned at an outlying "bush" township in the far north of Sweden, six hours only from Stockholm but fifteen hours hard travelling from my true destination a long way inside the Polar Circle. I glanced again at my ticket, and saw that it was made out even to Narvik, for had not my friend Hr. Nils Mård, *Förste byråsekreterare* of the Royal Swedish State Railways, told me as we sat smoking cigars after the Traffic Association dinner at the Wivex restaurant in Copenhagen that no traveller to Lapland for the first time should miss the scenery between Björkliden and Narvik, which is of course in Norway.

Should I then remain another twenty-four hours at Ange, and catch the next night's Stockholm-Lapland special—for there was nothing sooner—and so round off my Swedish journeyings as originally intended? Or return to Stockholm and take things easy there for a week, visiting again the museums and art galleries, and enjoy the rich spectacle of Stockholm life, before sailing home from the West Coast?

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole earth and lose his own soul?" . . .

## CONCLUSION

And I thought of the truest friend my life had known—of one who when I was eleven and she less than fourteen had nursed me through pneumonia; who had never forgotten birthdays, so that gifts would turn up on the right date in the Australian Bush, or in the *poste restante* at Auckland, a book at Madrid, or a card at Delhi—of one who had never uttered reproaches for giving up the substance for the shadow; of one who during youth and right through manhood had always been in the background to stanch an emotional wound, or relegate to their right significance life's manifold blows and disillusionings; who spoke not of faiths but when stricken and foreseeing the conclusion, had gently placed in my hand one day her small crucifix and pressed my fingers over it in silence:

*" . . —its home, its harbour found,  
Measuring the gulf, it stoops and dares the final bound."*

How shall the flowers bloom without her smile?  
The birds in Spring return now stilled her voice?  
How shall my lonely heart delay awhile  
To make her golden goodness its like choice?

Never her comfort did she fail to give,  
Nor deed of kindness scarce fail to do.  
A life of selflessness she dared to live,  
And Christ-like died in making love come true.

She was compact of fondness, beauty, truth;  
She nothing knew of the dissembler's art—  
Only the language of Naomi's Ruth,  
Only the impulse of a loving heart. . . .

Now she is where the blessed Saints abide,  
Forever free from Life's slow-racking rod.  
Her soul has braved its Sun o'er Death's dark tide—  
The Throne of her Exemplar, and her God!

*And were we not saying long ago that the soul when using the body as an instrument of perception, that is to say, when using the sense of sight or hearing or some other sense (for the meaning of perceiving through the body is perceiving through the senses)—were we not saying that the soul too is then dragged by the body into the region of the changeable, and wanders and is confused . . .*

## CONCLUSION

But when returning into herself she reflects, then she passes into the other world, the region of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself and is not let or hindered . . . and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom?

That is well and truly said, Socrates, he replied.

And to which class is the soul more nearly alike and akin, as far as may be inferred from this argument, as well as from the preceding one?

I think, Socrates, that, in the opinion of every one who follows the argument, the soul will be infinitely more like the unchangeable—even the most stupid person will not deny that.

And the body is more like the changing?

Yes.

Yet once more consider the matter in another light: When the soul and the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern, and the body to obey and serve. Now which of these two functions is akin to the divine? and which to the mortal? Does not the divine appear to you to be that which naturally orders and rules, and the mortal to be that which is subject and servant?

True.

And which does the soul resemble?

The soul resembles the divine, and the body the mortal—there can be no doubt of that, Socrates.

Then reflect, Cebes: of all which has been said is not this the conclusion?—that the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and that the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintellectual, and multi-form, and dissoluble, and changeable. Can this, my dear Cebes, be denied?

It cannot.

But if it be true, then is not the body liable to speedy dissolution? and is not the soul almost or altogether indissoluble?

Certainly.

‘Such was the end, Echécrates, of our friend; concerning whom I may truly say, that of all the men of his time whom I have known, he was the wisest and justest and best.’<sup>1</sup>

“I love—. . . I am not afraid—. . .”

<sup>1</sup> *Phædo*: The Dialogues of Plato—translated into English by B. Jowett, M.A. (Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, Mdcccxcii, pp. 222–3).

## CONCLUSION

She had gone to the soul's "Lovely Land", the "Land of the Midnight Sun". And suddenly Lapland did not seem to matter very much at that moment—

"Bred Dina vida vingar  
O Herre över mig,  
och låt mig stilla somna  
och vakna upp hos Dig. . ."

"Laudate sia mio Signore per suor nostra morte corporale . . ."

"Nos vidas son los rios  
que van a dar  
en la mar,  
que es el morir."

"Joy, shipmates, Joy! . . ."

What was the favourite prayer of Francis, of the Saint for whom St. Bridget always cherished so particular a devotion, even to framing the Rule of her own dual Brother- and Sisterhood on that of the Franciscan Order?—"Deus meus et Omnia": "My God and My All!" . . . Was beauty then, after all, a snare, and the tormenting beauty of woman the biggest snare of all, as the early saints averred? Was there but one good, and one good only worthy of all man's strivings in his brief mortal day—purification, saintliness, in face of the awful Purity and the inconceivable Sanctity of the Everlasting God?

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The task is done, the book is ended; and as I lay down my pen I say: Let Sweden flourish! and long may she continue to delight the eye and charm the ear in a world blinded to truth and beauty by its own self-torturings; long may her handsome "dolichocephalic" sons, uncomfortably magnetic daughters, and adorable children, inspire and humble vagrant married aliens like me:



## CONCLUSION

Even such is Time, that takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,  
And pays us but with earth and dust;  
Who in the dark and silent grave,  
When we have wandered all our ways,  
Shuts up the story of our days.  
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,  
My God shall raise me up, I trust.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Conclusion*, Sir Walter Raleigh (written in the Tower the night before his execution, 28 October, 1618).

## THE END

(Some chapters written in Egypt, 1937; MS. resumed in London—Iver—Karlstad—Stockholm; completed at Orchard Farm, Woldingham, Surrey, December 1947.)

## APPENDIX

(Notes from a Commonplace Book used for reference purposes in the writing of *The Lovely Land*)—

Thou must never  
Mock or laugh at  
A guest or a wayfarer—(Norse code)  
—*Song of Hammal*

“Between the years 985 and 1011 these enterprising mariners (i.e. the Vikings) . . . discovered the great continent of America, with the inhabitants of which they seem to have had some struggles. . . . Five distinct expeditions are related in the Sagas, the most famous one being that of Thorfinn Karlsefui, who about 1007 determined to settle a colony in the new land, and who on his return sold some of the wood which he had brought home for a large sum to a merchant from Bremen.”—*The Viking Age*, vol. II, pp. 519–20. (For detailed descriptions of America and the Indians as discovered by the Vikings five hundred years before Columbus, see the *Frater Arboir*, i–541.)

“It was typical of him that he did not like Galahad as a hero. ‘No, no, not Galahad,’ he would say, ‘Galahad was not a patch on his father. Lancelot was the stuff. There you have a man; you have humanity; you have sinfulness.’”—*J. L. Garvin: A Memoir*, by Katherine Garvin (Heinemann, 1948), p. 169.

A lily of a day is fairer far in May,  
Although it fall and die that night;  
It was the plant and flower of light.  
In small proportions we just beauties see:  
And in short measures, life may perfect be.  
—BEN JONSON

“In some of his more positive moods he described himself as an inveterate ‘lover’, in the sense of a declared and devout worshipper of the great energy of Nature which, in its various workings amongst men, was called by the general name of ‘Eros’ . . . the lowest is linked with the highest.”—Introduction to Plato’s *Symposium* by W. R. M. Lamb, M.A. (Loeb Classical Library), pp. 75, 77.

## THE LOVELY LAND

Empedocles spoke of Love as the combining, and Strife as the disruptive, force pervading the Universe.

"I have learnt how mighty and wonderful and universal is the sway of this god over all affairs both human and divine." *Symposium* (Eryximachus).

"The cause of it all is this, that our original form was as I have described and we were entire, and the craving and pursuit of that entirety is called Love." (Aristophanes.)

"As hinds or heifers in springtime, when sated with pasture, bound about a meadow, so they, holding up the folds of their lovely garments, darted from the hollow path, *and their hair like a crocus flower streamed about their shoulders*. And they found the good goddess by the wayside, where they had left her before, and led her to the house of their dear father." *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

Compare with:

"Gisli could not sleep, and said that he wanted to go from the house to his hiding-place of the cliffs and try if he could not sleep there. They all went—Gisli, his wife And, and her foster-daughter Gudrid; they had on kirtles, *which left a track in the dew*." Gisli Sursson's Saga, p. 67.

### *Sappho's Magic*

"May you sleep in the bosom of a tender comrade."

"I have a pretty little daughter who looks like a golden flower, my darling Cleis, for whom I would not take all Lydia, nay nor lovely Lesbos."

"Evening star, that bringest back all that lightsome Dawn hath scattered afar, thou bringest the sheep, thou bringest the goat, thou bringest her child home to the mother."

"Thy form, O bride, is all delight; thy eyes are of a gentle hue; thy fair face is overspread with love; Aphrodite hath done thee exceeding honour." (Naval wedding at Skeppsholmen, see "Stockholm Notes.")

As the hyacinth which the shepherd tramples  
on the hill  
Lies upon the ground, and lying bloometh  
purple still.

## APPENDIX

"Thus of old did the dainty feet of Cretan maidens dance pat to the music beside some lovely altar, *pressing the soft smooth bloom of the grass.*"

"I loved you, Athis, long ago, when my own girlhood was still all flowers . . ."

"But I have received true prosperity from the golden Muses, and when I die I shall not be forgot."

you burn me . . .  
to embrace you, my beloved.

"Love is in no haste to fly to me with his gift of pain."

"Whose breast is sweet as violets."

*Somebody, I tell you, will remember us hereafter.*

"the yielding of the female to the male is called by the ancients *χάρις*, 'grace'." *Hephaestion*, Handbook of metre.

"Socrates is wild with love for Phaedrus; Sappho's heart is shaken by love as oaks by a down-rushing wind."

As for me, love has shaken my wits as a  
down-rushing whirlwind that falls upon the oaks.

"And the maids ripe for wedlock wove garlands." *Lyra Græca* (cf. Chapter XXX, "High Midsummer").

"In short, she altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in a certain delicious Pafion, which in spite of acid Disappointment, gin-horse Prudence and bookworm Philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest pleasure here below." *Autobiography*, Robert Burns (from the original holograph Ms. in the Grenville Library, British Museum).

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